

## Future Hacking by Bix Bickson

What if you could design your future?

The average lifespan of an S&P 500 company has fallen from sixty-seven years a century ago to just fifteen years today, and 40 percent of today's Fortune 500 companies won't exist a decade from now. Clearly, it is not in the best interest of any established company, no matter its size or industry, to wait until disaster is at the gate to initiate transformative risks.

You have been living in your house for years, it is a great house, comfortable, relaxed and everyday you walk by a door to the broom closet. No sweat. That's the broom closet. Day after day, you live in the house, everything is cool. Walking through the house...going by the door to the broom closet...la de da...and then one day you happen to open the door to the broom closet and there is the entrance to a whole new house - a house that goes beyond anything you have ever fathomed - and you never knew was there before.

That is what Future Hacking is - walking into a world that was always there...you have had those moments. when the world was your oyster, when you and your company were unstoppable, that it was all going up and to the right...Future Hacking is about direct access to what is happening in those moments and creating those moments for all the people with whom you work.

The way we currently relate to those moments is meager, paltry and dismal: 'we were in the zone, we worked as a team, we had access to all the resources we needed, it all came together, we had the right people in the room, we had a great leader'...uggghhhhhh!...no access.

Future Hacking solves the problem of waiting for the world to disrupt your business to you knowing how to continuously create and fulfill the future of your choosing.

Our approach: *Each patient carries their own doctor inside them. They come to us not knowing that truth. We are best when we give the doctor who resides within each patient a chance to go to work.*<sup>1</sup>

Open the broom closet door.

### **What weakens companies:**

We believe there are 5 chief reasons that weaken companies: complacency, binary logic; an aversion to risk; disengaged employees; and rigid, time-consuming processes. The same core competence that made companies so successful in the early stages of their lifecycle eventually also becomes their Achilles' heel—or their 'core incompetence' that eventually brings them down.<sup>2</sup>

## **Complacency:**

Many large tech firms have become victims of their own success: they rose to success riding the wave of one major technology cycle which typically lasts 7 to 8 years - but they don't know how to ride the next wave. They fail to understand that the innovation born out of the previous cycle isn't relevant in the new emerging cycle: they are reluctant to go back to the drawing board and invent next generation solutions as they are unwilling to unlearn the past generations best practices. The bad news is that technology cycles are now getting shorter and shorter, forcing incumbents to unlearn and relearn even faster.

“Success is a lousy teacher. It seduces smart people into thinking they can't lose.” Bill Gates

The only resource not subject to diminishing returns is knowledge. It is the creation of knowledge that will provide your organization with continued success. Our ability to learn – learning to learn – is the most needed transformation in ourselves and in our organizations if we are going to successfully meet the challenges of the global marketplace.

## **Binary logic:**

in [logic](#), the semantic principle (or law) of bivalence states that every declarative sentence expressing a proposition (of a theory under inspection) has exactly one truth value, either true or false.

If you have children, particularly as they become teenagers you know exactly what this means. “Lucy doesn't like me...I am not good at math...you don't get it...whatever!”

School ruined us. They taught us to think: good/bad, right/wrong, I like that/I don't like that, I agree with that/I don't agree with that. Put anything in: customers, competitors, employees, processes, products, yourself.. Such binary logic is anchored in deep seated assumptions preventing companies from reconciling polarities, a process that could, ironically, yield disruptive innovation.

Studying the lives of creative geniuses in our history, one of their most distinguishing capabilities, was the ability to take two seemingly antithetical elements and merge them into a unified whole.

Reason leads to conclusions, *a conclusion is when we get tired of thinking.*

## **An aversion to risk:**

In a recent commencement address at Singapore Management University, John Seely Brown made the compelling point that all corporate architectures are setup to withstand risk and change. Furthermore, he said, all corporate planning efforts attempt to scale efficiency and

predictability, meaning they work to create static—or at least controlled-growth—environments in the belief that they will reduce risk. But in today’s fast-changing world, Seely Brown continued, just the opposite is true. Mark Zuckerberg agrees, noting, “The biggest risk is not taking any risk.”

Constant experimentation and process iteration are now the only ways to reduce risk. Large numbers of bottom-up ideas, properly filtered, always trump top-down thinking, no matter the industry or organization. Seely Brown and Hagel call this “scalable learning,” and given the growth rates of exponential organizations, it is their only possible strategy. In the best cases, exponential organizations feature both—that is, ideas are developed bottom-up and get acceptance/ratification/support from the top.<sup>3</sup>

### **Disengaged employees:**

Too many organizations—not just companies, but governments and nonprofits as well—still operate from assumptions about human potential and individual performance that are outdated, unexamined, and rooted more in folklore than in science. They continue to pursue practices such as short-term incentive plans and pay-for-performance schemes in the face of mounting evidence that such measures usually don’t work and often do harm. Worse, these practices have infiltrated our schools, where we ply our future workforce with iPods, cash, and pizza coupons to “incentivize” them to learn. Something has gone wrong. The good news is that the solution stands before us—in our innate need to direct our own lives, to learn and create new things, and to do better by ourselves and our world.<sup>4</sup>

Carrots and sticks: : The Seven Deadly Flaws 1. They can extinguish intrinsic motivation. 2. They can diminish performance. 3. They can crush creativity. 4. They can crowd out good behavior. 5. They can encourage cheating, shortcuts, and unethical behavior. 6. They can become addictive. 7. They can foster short-term thinking.<sup>5</sup>

Human beings have an innate inner drive to be autonomous, self-determined, and connected to one another. And when that drive is liberated, people achieve more and live richer lives.<sup>6</sup>

Companies foster an implicit employment contract in which employee contributions and deference to authority are traded in exchange for compensation, a career path, and some measure of job security. In effect, we trade personal discretion, freedom, and latitude for independent action as the price of membership in a company. As witnessed by the reluctance of DMs to take initiative, this “contract” is deeply embedded. And it takes considerable effort to alter it—not just by executives but by employees as well. Communication styles of most corporations are at odds with the collaborative spirit of Gen Y and Z workers. Unless companies find an innovation mechanism to keep their Gen Y and Z employees fully engaged, these young workers are likely to feel marginalized and leave for organizations that truly capitalize on their creative talent.<sup>7</sup>

## **Rigid Time-Consuming Processes:**

Changemakers have brilliant ideas and vision—and are often fiercely loyal to the company—but they are frustrated by limitation. Eventually, after being held back by interminable management layers and bureaucratic processes, they get fed up and leave, or are fired. Prime examples of this phenomenon are ex-Google employees Ev Williams, Biz Stone, Dennis Crowley, Ben Silbermann and Kevin Systrom, all of whom founded startups (Twitter, FourSquare, Pinterest and Instagram, respectively) after leaving Google. Google is a hugely successful company, of course, but imagine where it would be today if those extraordinary individuals had stayed. (And Google has a better track record than most companies.)<sup>8</sup>

The mindless adherence to rules, combined with a steady loss of principles, is always a prelude to bureaucracy.<sup>9</sup>

But there is no alternative. The organization must be empowered so that people can make their own decisions. All over the world, creative networkers are becoming better educated and better able to take matters into their own hands. And the more educated people are, the less effective authoritarian power is.<sup>10</sup>

Success in the second half of the twentieth century, has three clear limitations in the fast pace and volatility of the twenty-first century: it is too expensive and resource consuming, it lacks flexibility, and it is elitist and insular. The orthodox Six Sigma culture weeds out “positive deviance”—the uncommon strategies used by those pioneering employees in a company who use unconventional and counterintuitive methods to solve vexing business problems that can't be addressed using traditional approaches. But, as Malcolm Gladwell points out in *Outliers*, positively deviant behavior and ideas are what actually drive game-changing innovation<sup>11</sup>

## **What is a large and established organization to do?**

**A do-nothing strategy is simply that - 'a do-nothing strategy'**

**Answer: Transform.**

Transformation isn't easy, however. A big company is like a supertanker: it takes a long time to turn. Nonetheless, it can be done.

There are many examples of big companies morphing into new markets over time. For example, Nokia used to be a tire company, Samsung was once a trading company and Intel got its start in memory chips. GE, a company with a long and distinguished history, has repeatedly reinvented itself. Few companies, however, are able to transform quickly.

Apple and IBM are two rare examples of large companies that have successfully undertaken an extreme transformation and executed it fairly quickly. And in both cases, inspiration grew out of desperation; each company was just a few months from running out of cash. At the same time, each also enjoyed a charismatic and bold leadership that was able to use dire circumstances as an impetus to turn the company around.

As economist Paul Romer has said, “A good crisis is a terrible thing to waste.”

But waste is exactly what most companies do, and the vast majority of eleventh-hour turnarounds don’t end well. .. the average lifespan of an S&P 500 company has fallen from sixty-seven years a century ago to just fifteen years today, and 40 percent of today’s Fortune 500 companies won’t exist a decade from now. Clearly, it is not in the best interest of any established company, no matter its size or industry, to wait until disaster is at the gate to initiate transformative risks.

However, many studies have revealed that the vast majority of corporate transformation projects fail. There are many reasons for these failures: complexity, long project timelines, lack of support from the top, exploding budgets and so on. However, a key structural reason is short-term thinking driven by stock prices and the pressure on quarterly earnings.

When a CEO or senior management team is faced with attempting a risky, long-term transformation versus just keeping the boat steady until their stock options vest, the choice defaults to the do-nothing strategy.<sup>12</sup>

### **The faraway stick does not kill the snake.<sup>13</sup>**

Future Hacking is a transformative process that works by immediately shifting the responsibility for success to the people inside your company.

The ability to imagine a possible future and then work backward to make more informed choices is a requisite of everything we call civilization. It is because of this ability that we take the time to build tools, to plant seeds, or to store food for the winter. <sup>14</sup>

Turning the fear of transformation into the transformation of fear.

*Sometimes I feel that life is a series of trapeze swings. I am either hanging onto a trapeze bar swinging along or, for a few moments in my life, I am hurtling across space between trapeze bars.*

*Most of the time, I spend my life hanging on for dear life to my trapeze-bar-of-the-moment. It carries me along at a certain steady rate of swing and I have the feeling that I am in control of my life. I know most of the questions and even some of the answers.*

*But every once in awhile as I am merrily (or not-so-merrily) swinging along, I look out ahead of me into the distance and what do I see? I see another trapeze bar swinging towards me. It's empty and I know, in that place in me that I know, that this new trapeze bar has my name on it. It is my next step, my growth, my aliveness coming at me. In my heart of hearts I know that, for me to grow, I must release grip on this present, well known bar and move to the new one.*

*Each time that happens to me I hope (no, I pray) that I won't have to let go of my old bar completely before I grab the new one. But in my knowing place, I know I must totally release my grasp on my old bar and, for some moment in time, I must hurtle across space before I grab onto the new bar.*

*Each time I am filled with terror. It doesn't matter that in all my previous hurtles across the void of unknowing I have always made it. I am each time afraid that I will miss, that I will be crushed on unseen rocks in the bottomless chasm between bars. I do it anyway. Perhaps this is the essence of what mystics call the faith experience. No guarantees, no net, no insurance policy, but you do it anyway because somehow to keep hanging on that old bar is no longer on the list of alternatives. So, for an eternity that can last a microsecond or a thousand lifetimes, I soar across the dark void of "the past is gone, the future is not yet here." It's called "transition". I have come to believe that this transition is the only place that real change occurs. I mean real change, not the pseudo-change that only lasts until the next time my old buttons get pushed.<sup>15</sup>*

### **'Whining the least appropriate response to suffering.'**

"Leonard Cohen used to study with Kyozan Joshu Sasaki Roshi at the Zen Center, on Mt. Baldy, for periods of learning and meditation that stretched over two or three months a year...And so, not long after getting home from the Château Latour tour, in 1993, Cohen went up to Mt. Baldy. This time, he stayed for nearly six years.

Nobody goes into a Zen monastery as a tourist," Cohen told me. "There are people who do, but they leave in ten minutes because the life is very rigorous. You are getting up at two-thirty in the morning; the camp wakes up at three, but you have to light fires in the zendo. The cabins are only heated a few hours a day. There's snow coming in under the badly carpentered doors. You're shovelling snow half the day. And the other half of the day you're sitting in the zendo. So in a certain sense you toughen up. Whether it has a spiritual aspect is debatable. It helps you endure, and it makes whining the least appropriate response to suffering. Just on that level it's very valuable." <sup>16</sup>

Whining was also least appropriate when I lived off-the-grid for 10 years in Canadian woods. I was too lost to know it was my monastery or that it was a life insurance policy for living my life. I am very thankful...and lucky...paddling a canoe across the raging Kingcome River to the Halliday's to get the mail, if the float plane could land, or carrying my 44 magnum revolver in case I stepped between a grizzly and her cubs - am glad I never had to use do it that.

In an argument with my wife Christine, slamming the door of our tiny house - built on skid logs so that when the high tides came in they would lap right to our door step - and just as the tide book said to the minute would recede - I would be outside. I could go to the woodshed. Or go to the woodshed. Or go back inside.

### **If you can't open it, you don't own it. (access)**

When I began my consulting there was a tiny section in bookstores - management, leadership, self-development. Now it is impossible not to be confronted by hundreds, if not thousands, of management, leadership and self-development books.

What the books forget to mention is, how do I take these ideas and integrate them.

A "hack" is an effort to get inside the guts of a piece of digital gear and use it for an unorthodox purpose. A self-hack is one carried out by the company that made the gear in the first place.<sup>17</sup> A Future Hack is to get inside your guts, the guts of your organization and develop the ability to create and fulfill the future of your choosing.

Future Hacking is a unique design and body of knowledge for individuals and organizations to perform in extraordinary ways.

Rather than a theory that leaves people with an explanation or description of the pathway, Future Hacking is direct access to inventing and fulfilling an audacious future from start-ups to some of the most successful companies in the world.

Future Hacking breaks people and companies out of acting inside someone else's thinking.

That is how entrepreneurs work. Having decided that the world must change in some important way, they simply find and build highways that lead inexorably to that result. Where others see barriers, they delight in finding solutions and in turning them into society's new and concrete patterns...few people are willing to step out beyond the safely conventional merely on the basis of good arguments.

The most important contribution any of us can make now is not to solve any particular problem, no matter how urgent energy or environment or financial regulation is. What we must do now is increase the proportion of humans who know that they can cause change. And who, like smart white blood cells coursing through society, will stop with pleasure whenever they see that something is stuck or that an opportunity is ripe to be seized. Multiplying society's capacity to adapt and change intelligently and constructively and building the necessary underlying collaborative architecture, is the world's most critical opportunity now. Pattern-changing leading social entrepreneurs are the most critical single factor in catalyzing and engineering this transformation.<sup>18</sup>

Guiding change may be the ultimate test of a leader – no business survives over the long term if it can't reinvent itself. But, human nature being what it is, fundamental change is often resisted mightily by the people it most affects: those in the trenches of the business. Thus, leading change is both absolutely essential and incredibly difficult.<sup>19</sup>

## **Getting Started**

Motivation 2.0 neglects a crucial part of who we are. From the moment that human beings first stared into the sky, contemplated their place in the universe, and tried to create something that bettered the world and outlasted their lives, we have been purpose seekers. “Purpose provides activation energy for living,” psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi says “I think that evolution has had a hand in selecting people who had a sense of doing something beyond themselves.”

So, in the end, repairing the mismatch and bringing our understanding of motivation into the twenty-first century is more than an essential move for business. It's an affirmation of our humanity.<sup>28</sup>

The most deeply motivated people—not to mention those who are most productive and satisfied—hitch their desires to a cause larger than themselves.

What are you standing for? If I ask you now as a leader, as an owner, as a founder, as a team leader, as an individual, what are you standing for?

Have you got one? It is time to decide what you and your company is standing for...with that burning in you, this will thrust you and your company into extraordinary outcomes.

The 'world', conventional wisdom, will always try to pull you back into the ordinary, trying to keep you safe. Hence, not everyone or every company achieves greatness. When your commitment burns strong enough there is no stopping you.

If you haven't, you are cruising.

You have to gotten inside your goals, getting into the guts - hacking - your goals to discover what is going to inspire people to plumb the depths of their energy, their creativity, their unstoppableity.

The goals that you are committed to...what makes them worth accomplishing? (see disengaged employees)

Can you look each other in the eye? Can you look yourself in the eye and know that you are living your commitments?

Make a promise to yourself that you don't have to sell out on your deepest dream for your business for your deepest dream for yourself.

Will you make that commitment? Or will you let it slip after a week? After two weeks. Living your commitment isn't easy.

Make your company great. Go and be great yourself.

Who are you? Can you answer that question?

'Again, you can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something — your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life.

Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma — which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.

Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish.' Steve Jobs

Entrepreneurial success rarely comes from the idea. Instead, it comes from the founding team's never-say-die attitude and relentless execution.

In the end, only raw, unbridled passion can solve an important problem and overcome the endless hurdles that present themselves. As investor Fred Wilson says, "Startups should be hunch-driven early on, and data-driven as they scale."<sup>20</sup>

A true hustler takes destiny into his own hands, using whatever tools he has at his disposal, propelling himself forward with an irrepressible will to succeed and determination <sup>21</sup>

You don't have to be the best leader. All it takes is a belief that people are fundamentally good—and enough courage to treat your people like owners instead of machines. Machines do their jobs; owners do whatever is needed to make their companies and teams successful.(22)

And

There is an ocean between saying and doing. What follows is a way to begin navigating this ocean.

**Culture: everything you don't have to do.**

“Culture eats strategy for breakfast.” Jon Ito

Culture is your company's only truly sustainable competitive advantage. No one can steal it or copy it, because culture is the sum total of your individual behaviors, values, attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions. Moreover, employees consistently cite culture as one of their prime reasons to join and stay with a company. In short, culture is the most effective and defensible tool to win with both customers and employees.<sup>23</sup>

The nature of a company: Benioff set up Salesforce as a pirate competitor with a humanitarian heart. Southwest has a freewheeling, fun-loving image. Apple is on a mission to bring elegant and uncompromising design to technology. What is your company's culture? What kinds of people lead it? What image does it want with the public and the media?<sup>24</sup>

Companies that are winning today are achieving levels of productivity and profitability that are impossible using traditional organizational models.

Whether it is the rain forest, the human body, the New York City food supply, or your organization, the notion of management through control is absurd. Rising wasted costs can be directly correlated to an attempt to layer on systems to control a virtually uncontrollable system.

How does a system organize itself – if it isn't through control – to successfully adapt to continuously changing circumstances? Let's begin by recognizing that most of the species that once slid, roamed or grew on our planet no longer exist. Why have these species become extinct? There are many theories: a dramatic change in the weather, the disappearance of their food supply, asteroids colliding with the earth, etc. One thing we do know, no matter what theory we ascribe to, the species that became extinct could not adapt to their changing circumstances.

## **DNA**

What gives a species the ability to adapt or not? Every living organism contains a set of instructions, rules, algorithms that tell it what it can and cannot do: DNA. This basic code either contains the information that can adapt to the changing circumstances or it does not. Now, extend the metaphor. Not only is the essence of every living organism a packet of information, a set of instructions, but also every organization has at its core its own DNA which is instructing it to successfully adapt to the changing circumstances, or not.

If you are willing to consider that a valuable way to locate organizational DNA is in language, a web of conversations, two dimensions begin to reveal themselves.

First, organizations, unlike living species are not genetically encoded. Even though we can find countless examples of organizations that haven't successfully adapted to the changing circumstances and have become extinct, it wasn't because they **could not** adapt. It was because they **did not** adapt.

Second, this view of organizations as a web of conversations gives us direct access to power. No one has ever or will ever be able to find the *culture* of an organization. Why? Because it doesn't exist as something that one can locate. *Culture* is a descriptive word. It is talking about something that is not happening. It is not what is happening. The map is never the territory; it is always a description of the territory.

### **Accessing Power**

Approaching organizational DNA as a web of conversations gives direct access to what is actually happening. Start listening. Listen to what people in your organization are saying; read the communications, the policies. Listen to what your customers, suppliers, shareholders, communities are saying. Maybe even more importantly, listen to yourself. What are you saying to yourself about the organization? Can you see that the conversation you are listening to right now is shaping your view of what can and cannot happen in the organization? Is the conversation that is going on in your head right now opening up or closing down the future?

If you are willing to consider that organizational DNA lives in language, then language takes on a new importance. Our relationship with language needs to be deepened. We want a relationship with language that leaves us powerful in the face of whatever circumstances present themselves.

If you switch directions, take people on the journey with you. Use language they will understand, and don't be frustrated if they don't get it right away. Be patient and know that any personal pivot involves ambiguity.<sup>25</sup>

'Culture Change is the most difficult thing you can do, because cultures are very entrenched...even with 30 people at ebay...what are the key things we are going to stand for...what are the things that are getting in the way of your being a great company?....problems do not get better with age...you got to run to the problem...escalate the problem in 24 hours and resolve them in 48...repetition does not get boring...focusing on a small number of things...what are the three things you are going to focus on.' Meg Whitman CEO of HP

Yet, thanks to variability, small variations make complex systems]adapt and change continuously by learning from the environment and being, sort of, continuously under pressure to be fit<sup>24</sup>

'In our innovation economy - the value proposition is completely different,

Creativity has less to do with your DNA than your environment - culture - it's the community and the ecology of the environment.

Security, sustainability, health and the enhancing of life as the number of people grows -these challenges are not technology challenges they are human behavior problems.<sup>26</sup>

As John Seely Brown has noted, the half-life of a learned skill used to be about thirty years. Today it's down to about five years.<sup>27</sup>

Management isn't about walking around and seeing if people are in their offices, It's about creating conditions for people to do their best work.

Our basic nature is to be curious and self-directed.

Today economic accomplishment, not to mention personal fulfillment, more often swings on a different hinge. It depends not on keeping our nature submerged but on allowing it to surface. It requires resisting the temptation to control people—and instead doing everything we can to reawaken their deep-seated sense of autonomy. This innate capacity for self-direction is at the heart of motivation.

The ultimate freedom for creative groups is the freedom to experiment with new ideas.

Some skeptics insist that innovation is expensive. In the long run, innovation is cheap. Mediocrity is expensive—and autonomy can be the antidote.” Tom Kelly General Manager, IDEO

Most organizations have a big, powerful constituency for 'what is' but almost no constituency for 'what could be.' ”<sup>29</sup>

## **Misfits**

Misfits fundamentally challenge the established practices of incumbent institutions, pushing boundaries and exploring opportunities that others might be too risk-averse or traditional to pursue. They provoke new mind-sets and attitudes, catalyzing big societal conversations about issues like sexuality, violence, human rights, equality,<sup>30</sup>

The principle of provoke isn't about having all the answers or even any of the answers. It's about creating the conditions for a new conversation to take place, challenging orthodoxies, encouraging dissent, and imagining alternatives.<sup>31</sup>

Being a misfit requires that you have a bit of double consciousness: able to see the logic and rationality of others' viewpoints while maintaining your own conviction. It also requires a long-term perspective. The hack, provocation, or hustle that you are trying to bring to the world might take some time to find acceptance.<sup>32</sup>

They aren't lone innovators working in a vacuum to grow the success of their ideas; they are working to transform the cultures around them. As we think about how to apply the skills of hustling, hacking, copying, provoking, and pivoting in our lives and work, we're ultimately faced with a much bigger challenge than harnessing a behavior or mindset. We are faced with the enormity of changing the systems and norms around us. And that can be a much slower process.<sup>34</sup>

How do you awaken hunger amid indifference or disgust? Answer: With persistence, pressure, and subtlety.<sup>36</sup>

Western firms now recognize that the best way to motivate—and retain—knowledge workers is not by giving them bonuses, but by giving them the freedom to pursue projects that they are passionate about.<sup>37</sup>

## B 2 Future Hacking

We are a team of baby boomer and millennial. We focus on creating new organizational DNA - transformation. We combine over 30 years of consulting experience with the passion and perspective of a new generation. We bring a track record of tapping the collective creativity of groups, inspiring others toward action, and accelerating significant measurable change across large complex projects.

Every moment we are making a choice - for ourselves and for our organizations. A choice that is either determined or informed by the past. What is ordinary is to be determined by what has gone before. What is extraordinary is to be informed by the past and imagine, create, invent and stand for a future that is truly worth accomplishing. Give yourself permission to be extraordinary.

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## Endnotes

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