





Christian Schools: Praise, Lament, Hope



Darren Welcome! As many of you know, organizationally we're part of an exciting transition right now with our esteemed Executive Director, Ed Noot—some would say retiring, some would say abandoning, or moving on to more coursework, as it were—and we're excited for him.

What that means for us as an organization is that we have a new Executive Director.

I'm Darren Spyksma, Director of Learning for SCSBC. I'm sitting today with Ed Noot, outgoing Executive Director, and Dave Loewen, incoming Executive Director.

We are spending a bit of time this morning chatting about what we feel strongly about when it comes to SCSBC, to Christian education, and our long-term hopes for Christian education.

This interview is an opportunity for our community to get to know Dave a little bit more as he takes on this new role.

So, gentlemen, you both have a history

together and a history with Christian schools. Both of you are obviously passionate about Christian education.

Ed, why don't you start us off. Talk a little bit about your story with Christian education, how you first engaged with SCSBC, and where you've seen both the organization and Christian education bring value here in BC, but in other places as well.

Ed I'm entering my 38th year of Christian education and never really envisioned that I'd be retiring from this position. I didn't really pursue this kind of leadership opportunity. I worked in SCSBC schools at Vancouver Christian, Abbotsford Christian, and Unity Christian.

I think early on I began to recognize that SCSBC offered a lot of support and encouragement and guidance for schools, and maybe was critical to the success of the Christian School movement

An Interview with Ed Noot & Dave Loewen





in British Columbia. Early in my career I had the privilege of sitting on the board of the Christian Teachers Association (CTABC), now Christian Educators of BC (CEBC). I was nominated to be their representative on the SCSBC Board. Lee Hollaar was the Executive Director at the time and just had a sense for the breadth and depth of the work that was happening at SCSBC.

So, I've been a big fan of the organization and count it a real privilege to have worked here for nine years.

Darren Great. Thank you. How about you, Dave?

Dave I'm entering my 29th year in Christian education and for my first job I was hired by Ed and Henry Contant. I see that God has a sense of humour as he's forced me back to do some more learning from Ed—which I'm excited about!

I think of SCSBC in terms of the people that have represented it. So, as a young teacher and

young administrator, it would have been with Lee Hollaar where I first experienced a significant interaction with SCSBC, being mentored and inspired by Lee to be involved in Christian education at a deeper level, to care more deeply about it, and then move into leadership.

That would be the way that I think of SCSBC. I often think of people like Lee Hollaar, kind of drawing me towards Christian education, which wasn't part of my childhood. Lee, Henry, and Ed would be reasons why I'm inspired by SCSBC. And also reasons why I am intimidated about this job, to be honest!

I've worked as a head of school at three schools: Abbotsford, White Rock, and Surrey, and have used different resources from SCSBC. But I'm not going to promote Ed and Henry's book, because I'm not getting any royalties!

Ed Neither am I!





Dave When I think of the word, "flourishing." I think one of the things I see SCSBC doing is finding ways to help. Schools flourish when someone comes alongside. In my experience as a head of school, often that's happening behind the scenes. When you're on the phone with a head of school or a board member, I just say, "look, here's what I think; give Ed a call!" There's just so much behind-the-scenes work that happens there that eventually plays out and manifests itself in good things for kids in the classroom.

That's my connection to SCSBC and how I see it and why I'm grateful to be part of it.

Darren That's good! You talked a little bit about being intimidated. Do you mind just talking a little bit about where that comes from?

Dave Well, I'm not nearly as good a golfer as Ed but I'm pretty sure I'm better than Henry! So, maybe that helps a bit. But yeah, all of us are different. I have huge respect for Ed. I wouldn't normally say that in the same room as him but I'm gonna take a risk and be a little uncomfortable right now; we're different people and so I have to figure out how to take what's good, what Ed has done well, and be myself in that role and learn that there's things that may not be as natural to me but I need to step forward and carry on well.

That's part of the neatness of this transition this year that I'm excited about. Ed and I have a good friendship and, in 16 years of not working at the same school, we've maintained that friendship and probably got closer. So this is exciting for me to be back working together again.

Darren Is there something that stands out—and I'm going to get back to you, Ed—but I'll put Dave on the spot first. Is there a specific challenge that you're looking at that you're thinking this is a challenge that SCSBC has, is facing, that we just need to be aware of?

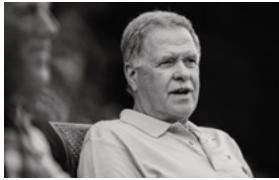
Dave Probably more than one, right? At three in the morning, what am I worrying about?

I think it's no secret our schools are struggling with some of the cultural divisions we're experiencing within Christianity right now. For me, I look at it and think, how do we center people deeply in the gospel, not sort of knee-jerk liberalism or knee-jerk conservatism, but actually what's the Jesus story? And not in a cheesy, looseygoosey way but what does the gospel call us to be that isn't the culture? What's the clarity around our school-specific mission/vision and how do we make sure we play that out? How do we make sure our policies and our practices manifest that well?

I think that's the big challenge for us, the biggest one—and I'm sure there's often a million micro-practical ones—but that jumps to my mind.

Ed I concur with Dave. I think he pretty much nailed it.

SCSBC has four pillars: community, advocacy, service, and vision. I think early on in the John Vander Hoek/Harro Van Brumellen days there





was a pretty big focus on vision and worldview and understanding what is Christian education. In the last decades, under Henry Contant's leadership and my own, we've worked hard to expand our service profile and we've added a lot—more staff and more services. But I think the pendulum needs to swing back to core vision. Who are we?

If someone were to read *The Link* articles I've written over my tenure, you'd see a distinct thread about Christian schools not being in isolated bubbles—they're connected with society. Our vision and mission have to be vibrant and have to be one of connectedness and they have to be externally focused. The time is right again for SCSBC to reemphasize that role and really be a leader in helping Christian schools shape and refine their vision.

Darren Great, thank you. We do see a lot of pressure from outside Christian circles about value. And I think that's speaking to the value we bring beyond educating students to the 'common good' or just flourishing of all.

There's a lot to celebrate about Christian education. There's a lot of reasons to celebrate the history of the organization in the history of Christian education. Is there one story or thing that is an example for our readers that summarizes, "I want to celebrate this about Christian education" or "here's an example where I've had the opportunity to see it as a leader"?

Ed I'll jump in. Our oldest school, Vancouver Christian School (VCS), founded in 1949 by recent

Dutch Reformed immigrants. It is alive and well. VCS is a thriving, flourishing place, but it is so different from what its founders could have ever imagined it to be. Now serving 800 students K to 12, +/- \$20 million building and a community that looks very different from the community that founded it. There's a whole new generation and a whole new group of ethnically diverse families in Vancouver that have said, "We value Christian education!" I think they're living the original mission and vision. Somehow the school has maintained its core vision, even though there's been so much change in the community and in the organization. It's a pretty dynamic kind of experience that I celebrate, and that's true for many of our schools in Metro Vancouver.

Dave I was thinking of a similar story, as you were talking. I am thinking that the Christian schools in SCSBC have the opportunity to dig deep into the Abrahamic blessing: blessed to be a blessing. It's easy to use that language when you're a cloistered community where everyone thinks and looks and acts the same way. But we're so diverse now, within those individual schools like Vancouver, but also within the Society of Christian Schools in BC, there's great diversity. I don't think that was there when I started. SCSBC schools were pretty similar. And now in school to school—a White Rock Christian and a Vancouver Christian and a Centennial Christian—they're all different. I think that's beautiful.

One of the examples that often grabs my heart is the story of Duncan Christian School (DCS). DCS is doing Christian education in Duncan. They have a high First People's population that's part of their community, and they're being intentionally different. They're not doing Surrey Christian education there and White Rock is not doing Centennial Christian education or Unity Christian. I look at what happens at Unity Christian School and the richness of some of their tech Ed programs that fit with the community that values that highly. It's very different than what happens at Richmond.

So, all of those stories—they're a beautiful, rich, and diverse tapestry that exemplifies this core idea of what we're called to do.

But Duncan is one that I've watched change from a school founded similarly to VCS and now is very different. And I think it's beautiful.

Darren I love that you chose Duncan because I was part of the second graduating class. There were 14 of us and there wasn't a whole lot of diversity in our graduating class at the time. So, it's exciting to see them embrace their broader community and reflect their community for sure.

Dave And really learning to be the gospel in a specific context, which is not just generic, but a bold statement of "this is who we are and where God has placed us." I love that story!

Ed I think the increasing diversity is something that we both sort of touched on, but another aspect that I am really celebrating is the attention we're paying to our buildings. When Christian schools started, I was a student at Edmonton Christian. It was a concrete building with some windows, a hallway, classrooms shooting off of it. It was not very imaginative or very aesthetically pleasing. It certainly wasn't designed around learning in any significant way. It was very much designed around functionality and affordability. We've had so many schools that have built recently and the creative design and the inten-

tionality around space is amazing! God is the God of aesthetics as well. It's a luxury in some ways to be able to do that, but I really celebrate the creative design and detailed attention to aesthetics that we just didn't see in decades past.

Darren Great stories. It is hard to be a Christian leader, and to lead well in Christian communities is always a demanding call. And whether it's the pandemic or it's other things that are bubbling up, I feel like we're in a season where it's particularly challenging. And that makes me sad. I wonder if there are specific laments that you have around our present time and how it impacts Christian education? And your wisdom to say: this is what we need to do about it. I'm sure we'd love to hear the hope side of the lament. Is there something that makes your heart ache around Christian education that you're hoping as a community we can respond to?

Dave I would go back to what I mentioned earlier—the temptation to be divisive. As I look at our schools, I can't help but reflect that they're being watched in their communities and so, what are we to be known by? The theologian Michael Gorman talks about this idea of "cruciformity." If the people around us have a sense that our love for them is self-sacrificial, that we might even give our life for them, then that is the thing that provides us with authority to engage in those problematic issues differently than if we start with a sense of certainty, or in judgment.

My hope would be that our schools would be beacons of that, places that are caring, that love their community well, and are seen that way. And hopefully that would give us the authority to (when we need to) take a stand on specific issues and that we would be respected because of our posture.

That's my lament: I think we need to get our act together—you know, the Christian life is a love story, and we're supposed to be lovers. Shane Claiborne often says, "we need less people who believe in Jesus and more who follow him." Can we follow together in a posture of humility,

recognizing that there's more than one faithful expression of the gospel?

My hope would be that we find a way together, for the sake of the Kingdom, for the sake of our witness and testimony in all our communities.

that we are seen to be people who even in the midst of difficulty, have a posture towards each other that is unselfish.

Ed I'm older than Dave, so I get to lament twice. And I do share Dave's lament very much.

Dave Well, as long as he doesn't lament about Dave!

Darren Or Darren for that matter!

Ed One of my laments is, and it's connected to what Dave was saying, but I just feel like biblical literacy is at an all-time

low and I feel like people aren't willing to do the hard work to understand the scriptural narrative. We're not steeped in it the way we could or should be or I would hope that we would be. Too often we have a very shallow, literalistic, kind of proof-texting understanding. I think we've fallen into a kind of lowest common denominator fundamentalism in some ways, and it grieves me, especially because many of our schools come out of a strong Reformed tradition that has a much richer understanding of scripture and of hermeneutics. I feel that has been diminished and I lament that.

My second lament is how we measure success. I think we've not thought as creatively as we can about what it means for us to be successful. So academic achievement, academic awards, and academic prestige become important indicators of success. Enrollment growth and the ability to build the kind of buildings I was just talking about and acquire land become benchmarks of success and I think that's misguided. We can think more

creatively and more authentically about: What would be markers of us as a successful Christian school in the light of our mission and vision? I lament that we haven't really cultivated that in the ways we could.

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Darren Now some hope to follow those laments.

Ed SCSBC can maybe play a small role in terms of trying to equip educators around biblical literacy. Maybe that's a space we need to step into. I do love the way SCSBC has partnered with other organizations, so again, I would hope that we would partner with Christian colleges and universities and other places in an effort to try to enhance literacy. Regarding the success one—again—it's a vision; it's a question of vision

and understanding. I think SCSBC can lead and guide and nudge schools to think creatively about that. That is part of why, as I passed the torch to Dave, the vision pillar of SCSBC really needs to stand out in the next number of years. We really need to help schools understand what they are all about and measuring their success is part of that.

Darren Gentlemen, that's great. I was a little worried about giving Ed the last chance to express a hope because I knew it would feel a little bit like a to-do list for you and me, Dave. It does feel a little bit like that, but that's ok—no pressure—it's good.

It's been a delight to get together. Ed, your leadership has again and again just been a great example for all of us and we appreciate that. Dave, we are excited about what you bring.

One of the things that the organization has seen is that every leader is different, and every leader has brought who they are, and God's been faithful with that, and I'm excited about that for our future and the work we get to do together. ②

Darren Spyksma

RECEIVED MY FIRST "D" from Harro Van Brummelen. I was taking an Introduction to Curriculum Studies course at Trinity Western University and apparently, my thinking was not aligned with Harro's instruction. At this time. Harro was Dean of the School of Education at TWU, and the school was working to finalize the application for the professional program for educators at TWU. Up to that point (my year included), TWU education students finished their degree by attending another institution to complete their PDP and receive their Bachelor of Education. In an interview with Wilma Van Brummelen, Harro's beloved widow, her response to my story was both humourous and telling, "Of course, if students didn't do good work, they would hear about it. I bet there were notes all over it about how you could improve."

Wilma was right. To Harro's credit, in a time

where this wasn't common practice, I immediately took his feedback to heart, worked through the night, and resubmitted my assignment. He graciously took the second assignment and gave it the same time as my first submission; the feedback was indeed much better.

Listening to Wilma share stories of Harro and his love for SCSBC, Christian education, and Christian educators, I was delighted to realize Harro's passions, hopes, and desires as the first Coordinator of SCSBC still permeate the organization today. As we swapped stories of what was then and what is now, common themes emerged. I found myself uttering phrases like, "yes, it's still like that" or "yes, we still try to be like that in the world." As we reflect on the importance of leadership in Christian education, Harro's gift to SCSBC and Christian education can still support us in our work today.

Even when the SCSBC office was in Harro and



Harro Van Brummelen

SCSBC COORDINATOR (1977 - 1986)

Wilma's basement, Harro believed in the power of community and connections. Whether it was having staff over at the house during teacher conventions or connecting with educators from other regions and organizations. Harro knew that for Christian education to flourish. Christian educators need to be connected and have a unified vision for learning. One of Harro's strengths was his relentless pursuit of building networks between SCSBC and different organizations, both faith-based and otherwise. Wilma smiled when I shared that in our most recent strategic plan, SCSBC highlighted the need to develop strategic partnerships to maximize impact for our member schools. It was encouraging for her to know that Harro's belief in the importance of networking and connection is still an embedded way of being for our organization.

For Harro, supporting a unified, independent

school voice to the provincial government through the work of the Federation of Independent Schools Associations in British Columbia (FISABC) was a meaningful way to support Christian education in BC. He always took the opportunities he received to represent independent schools on government committees. He knew that relationships with the provincial government and the Ministry of Education were instrumental in supporting and protecting Christian education. Hearing that a positive relationship with local and provincial governments was still part of the mandate of SCSBC and that both our outgoing and incoming executive directors have a role at FISABC was another connection between Harro's work and the continued work of SCSBC.

Harro's passion for SCSBC would sometimes conflict with his love for and desire to be with his



family. Christian leadership has always been challenging; for Wilma and Harro, it meant regularly discussing how travel and being away impacted life at home. It didn't take too long in this part of the discussion before Wilma looked at me and asked me how my family had managed this aspect of

my role at SCSBC. "We needed boundaries; Christian leaders need boundaries. For us, it was July. Though it wasn't always easy, I made sure that Harro didn't work that month." The trying years of leading in a pandemic have taken a toll on us as leaders, and we know that leadership well-being is essential to a healthy Christian leader. More of us probably need a Wilma in our life, ensuring that we keep to our Sabbath boundaries.

Harro believed in the importance of worldview and using a theologically rich integrated curriculum. He published numerous books and articles to this effect. Wilma showed me copies of his more influential books, *Walking*

with God in the Classroom and Steppingstones to Curriculum, translated into multiple languages. Harro believed a good curriculum empowered teachers to see the hand of God in a blade of grass and to share that awe with their students. "Who's supporting new teachers in helping them see the world this way, Darren? Are you still ensuring that the story of Creation, Fall, Redemption is being taught to new teachers?" After sharing the work of "The Residency: A Place for Christian Deeper Learning" with Wilma and the various year-long threads that support this development in teachers, I am not sure she was convinced. "Harro and I believed in mentoring new staff. If we are going to support teachers with the integration of faith and learning, new teachers need a buddy teacher who can walk with them and help them with the practicality of living this out."

Harro's challenge still rings true. We need to think deeply about what we are learning while supporting our educators as they play a significant formational role in their students' lives.

Harro was constantly anticipating potential risks and threats to Christian education. As an organiza-

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tion, this is best represented in our pillar, "vision." Though I did not know it until my conversation with Wilma, we are walking in the footsteps of SCSBC's first employee:

- regularly scanning the horizon;
- obtaining legal opinions on behalf of our schools:
- creating resources to support school sustainability and flourishing.

There was an extended silence when I asked the awkward question, "If Harro was alive today, what do you think he would say were current risks and threats to Christian education?" The

conversation meandered a bit after this, but it was clear that Harro believed that Christian education should be part of society, not outside of society. Communities should see the Christian school as a positive contributor to the world, not just to Christians. It got quiet once again when prompted about specifics, but Wilma's response still has me thinking: "Every human being carries the image of God. But as Christians, we get worried about rules. As a result, we *don't* treat people as image bearers."

We are entering a new time in Canadian history where polls suggest that more than half of Canadians see Christianity as having a more negative than positive impact on society. Harro's call to active participation in all facets of life and society in the 1980s is still a call to action worth working towards today. \bigcirc

John Vanderhoek

SCSBC EDUCATION COORDINATOR (1986 - 1997)

A Season of Change

N 1989, THE NEWLY elected Social Credit government decided to review education in the province of BC. The Minister of Ed-

ucation of that era was a retired school superintendent who took the opportunity to institute a commission charged with reviewing education and drafting a plan for school revitalization called "The Year 2000." This became the blueprint for public school and curriculum development. Because SCSBC was seen as a stakeholder in education, it, through FISA, was involved in not only submitting recommendations to the Minister but also in helping schools implement educational change. Some teachers employed in SCSBC schools were leaders in teacher training workshops sponsored by the ministry. One SCSBC school was identified by the education reporter of the Vancouver Sun of the time as a positive example of implementing Year 2000.

The focus of the changes was developing and implementing student-oriented teaching/learning practices. The previous emphasis on developing

a biblically founded curriculum continued, but now pedagogical change also became important. Pedagogy teaches students a lot about who they

are and the abilities/gifts they are developing. During these years, several handbooks were developed, providing teachers with a wide range of alternative strategies and helpful lessons for teaching of language arts, visual arts, French and biblical studies, as well as learning assistance. All these handbooks were intended to assist teachers in implementing various teaching, learning, and evaluation strategies.

All this took place in the context of widespread educational change suggested by various educational theorists (whole language, student-oriented math learning, project-based learning, middle school restructuring, differentiated evaluation approaches, etc.). The focus was always on implementing biblically directed thinking and practice and how Christian schools need to reflect Christ as

they support students in pursuing God's call. This season of educational change was an exciting time of reflection and growth. \bigcirc

The focus was on implementing biblically directed thinking and practice and how Christian schools need to reflect Christ as they support students in pursuing God's call. This season of educational change was an exciting time of reflection and growth.





Lee Hollaar

SCSBC COORDINATOR / DIRECTOR (1989 - 2003)

Our Successes Are Not Our Own

of grey in our minds. However, in the case of the development of the story of SCSBC and its role in giving leadership to the BC Christian school community and beyond, the story can only be seen as the evolution of a celebrated Spirit-directed presence. I was privileged to be part of the story from 1988 to 2003. Any advancements of the story are blessings of the Spirit. It is a continuum and doesn't happen in isolation. Thomas Merton once said, "Our successes are not our own. The way to them was prepared by others. The fruit of our labours is not our own: for we are preparing the way for the achievements of others." (Adapted from *No Man Is an Island*)

Even the title of Executive Director is an evolution. The first directors were intentionally called coordinators with a particular commitment to working as a community. Expanding upon the successful work of my predecessors, I joined the organization as a coordinator specifically to further develop school leadership, board leadership in school governance, and a deepened engagement in the independent school movement in BC. Over time the title of coordinator morphed to director, and that morphed into executive director. The initial title of coordinator was chosen intentionally in an effort to shape a flatter organization whose priority was to shape an enabled and dynamic faith community in the classrooms. A Christian perspective for teaching was paramount. That shaped other parts of the critical schooling infrastructure, namely administration, governance, and development.

And so accredited leadership enablement courses began, and people with recognized gifts and potential were encouraged to pursue leadership and avail themselves of leadership training. Participating in professional development was encouraged for school leaders. Even a more global engagement in leadership enablement initiatives was undertaken. We began worldview and leadership courses, board governance workshops, vision setting workshops, conflict resolution workshops, leader reviews, and financial development conferences. We defined leadership as community building toward a more faithful direction. A particular blessing in the SCSBC story is that these directional leadership initiatives occurred because of stewardship of the gifts among our community—still acts of coordination. Educational and organizational leadership was explored; there was further deepening of teachers' Christian worldview understanding of the praxis of teaching Christianly; and we held workshops on setting board policy, reorganization, and procedural fairness in governance practices. All of these combined contributed to a mutually supportive Christian school community that was intent in pursuing greater biblical faithfulness in the operation of Christian schools. It was during this time that Christian Schools Canada was organized to more effectively guide our schools and be stewards of our resources. We celebrate what we see today at the SCSBC. ②

Henry Contant

SCSBC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (2003 - 2015)

Growing and Flourishing

N MY CONTINUING ROLE working with Christian school leaders, I am frequently asked, "What do I need to do to be a great school leader?" Phrased somewhat differently, I'm also asked, "How do I know if I'm being effective as a leader?"

I typically respond by asking them, "Are the people you are called to lead growing and flourishing?" Ultimately, school leadership is not so much about you, your reputation, or your personal success stories, but about the people and organizations you are called to lead. Effective leaders continually equip and mentor individuals to grow and flourish as leaders. Fundamentally, the leader role

ensures that those around them also grow in their passion, insight, and skillset to effectively fulfill their call.

I am profoundly grateful to the many mentors who invested in me throughout my educational and leadership journey. I have been able to stand on the shoulders of those who came before me. Their examples and experiences further fueled my passion for ongoing leadership development.

As SCSBC continues to equip school leaders and boards, I urge current administrators, learning leaders, teachers, and board members to be intentional about leadership development, share time, and

offer guidance, encouragement, and wisdom with a younger or less experienced person. Mentoring others is personally rewarding and a valuable gift every administrator or teacher can give to others, ultimately strengthening Christian education's

> cause. Over time, small, incremental, and intentional steps will lead to significant change and growth.

> Don't be a "lone ranger." We live in community, learn from others in community, and are held accountable by community. Don't try to walk alone as a teacher, administrator, or school board member. SCSBC is all about community. Draw from the wealth of experiences, life stories, and examples of oth-

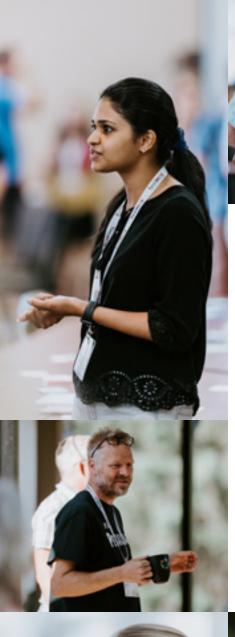
held accountable by community. ers. Be an active part of a larger Christian school

support community. For example, get involved with the CPABC (principals), the CEBC (teachers), the SCSBC (School Board members), or one of the many networks that SCSBC has established for principals and superintendents, business managers, development directors, board/committee members, teachers, learning leaders, special education coordinators, librarians, international student coordinators, and IT directors.

Blessings as you encourage others to grow and flourish, and in doing so, you will be fulfilling your calling as a leader. 🞨

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The Residency serves to equip Christian educators with practical professional development with the anticipation that these practices will lead to deeper learning opportunities for students. ■ Over one week, teachers participate in a growth track of their choosing and work with educational coaches and mentors to design learning opportunities catered explicitly to their current practice. We offer small coach-to-participant ratios to ensure all participants leave equipped and confident in introducing or continuing their deeper learning practices in their schools.

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