

How To Find A Job

“The five Fortress guys hadn’t spent years toiling in obscurity to build their business. Fortress was founded as a private partnership only a decade ago by *Joe Dokes*, now 47, *Mary Sue* 51, *Johnny Jones*, 45. *Joe Schmo*, the CEO is a cerebral intense, very private wunderkind who made his reputation at Lehman Brothers- and a fortune for his firm-buying assets from Resolution Trust Corporation. He made partner at Lehman when he was barely past 30. In 1993 he left abruptly as the press described it due to “philosophical differences with management.” He joined the prestigious money management firm called BlackRock, , split to spend a short year at the Swiss Bank UBS, and then set up his own shop, Fortress.”

“Over the Hedge” by Bethany McLean
Vanity Fair, April 2009

(Italics my own for fictional names)

As I write this article, it is December, cold out. A fire crackles in the fire place. Glancing out the living room window the trees are bare and shivering to a light icy wind from the north, always from the north this time of year. There’s a fresh snow across the valley at Valley Forge. The trees bare, I can see that hallowed ground. Retired and finished with business after thirty years, my company, it doesn’t matter which one, one of the Five Hundred, did pretty well. It’s still doing well in this economic mess. The company got where it did by the long hard slog, the same as me. The iron men who started that company practiced an unwritten code, perhaps instilled by their Depression Era parents or old school university professors, Doctor Kingsfield, Professor Cicero, Mr. Aristotle.

Year in and year out the iron men founders took the hits, took losses gracefully, and celebrated when fortune smiled at them, the same as me. They took care of their workers. I am grateful and my family is grateful. I express gratitude. But somewhere back there, we threw out those rules of double entry book keeping, regulation and ethics, and empathy, treating others decently. It was back there when getting rid of people by the box car load added a few more percent points to the year end bottom line. Short term gain. I slipped out the cluttered dark back hallway through the rusting iron doors. Air hissed from the crushing, snapping lock pins of the old corporation door slamming shut in clouds of dust, ending what some had begun to call the era of old line companies. Once out, we could not get back in, ever.

And today I hear the young graduates interviewed on the evening news puzzled and wondering why no one has replied to fifty, one hundred or more resumes mailed and emailed *so far*. The fuzzy word *Intern* has suddenly appeared in job hunt conversations. Intern: The crawling to firms just for the opportunity to work for free. There is even a question as to the legality of non paid internships. Those lucky ones who have become

interns, receiving no pay, are afraid to complain for fear of being fired from a job for which they receive no income. What's happening here?

Let's assume several conditions exist for the reader. That you want to work at some level between the billion dollar gang at Fortress, AIG whatever, Goldman Sachs and rock bottom; that you can communicate one way or another, and that you can place one foot or artificial limb in front of another.....or wheel chair as the case may be. I will not blather on about motivation, determination or tell syrupy stories about people, like Gandhi, Ho Chi Minh, Roosevelt, or Generals George Patton or Marine General Chesty Puller who overcome great odds in achieving victory, reaching their objective or enjoyed success in realizing their goals. That's old company stuff. I will discuss the process of beginning; seizing the moment and turning up the heat on your self. White hot, razor sharp, quietly applied tireless focus upon your objective, finding a job. Not getting rich. No fast bucks here. No gambling with other people's money, money entrusted to you that you might use to pad your own income. Just good old Campbell Soup; Knish on the corner, Check is in the mail, hard work.

You should know something about me. I grew up on Georgia in the Fifties. I had a great mom and dad, children of the Great Depression, who achieved their dream of owning a little home in a good part of town. Mother's household was budgeted to the last penny. Dad was a cop who looked out for the young people in our little town, kept them out of trouble and caught them when they seemed to drift. Like Randolph Scott the cowboy in the fifteen cent Saturday movies, he was a peaceable man, but he could flip a wild drunk in a second. His name was Tom, I was known in this small town as Tom's boy. I struggled in school. A 'c' and 'd' student, it took me weeks to read a book. In arithmetic, my mother made me, over the dinning room table, learn long division. I could not get it. When my tears dripped upon the paper, she would tell me to call her from the kitchen after I finished crying and then we would begin again. Mother, her name was Grace, was teaching me the power of focus. Not giving up. Not quitting. Job hunting is not a comfortable activity. It's a growing activity.

After the crash of 1929, the door that swung-*I like door metaphors*- open to the Great Depression, my dad then fifteen saw his father's grain elevator business vanish. Soon his family's farm, house and all they owned were repossessed. In the last days of their occupancy, the door slammed down stairs one cold Indiana morning and hearing the boots of his brother ascending the stairs, he peeked from beneath the covers in his icy room and learned of his father's death. These events left an emotional scar upon his being for a lifetime. Nearing the time of my father's death, he wept telling me this story. At sixteen, belongings scattered, food and shelter in question, he went to a wealthy local business man. He wished to borrow five dollars.

With the money he planned to travel north to Michigan City on old route 421 to a warehouse in a desolate eastern shore of Lake Michigan where it was rumored he might find work. It was a distance of fifty eight miles one way. On the snow covered landscape, clutching the five dollars in his pocket, he set out walking. After walking some miles into

freezing darkness, a snazzy car pulled up. It was a rum runner making the rounds of speakeasies. *"Get in kid. You'll freeze your ass off."* After many colorful stops along the way he was deposited on the frigid outskirts of Lake Michigan where he hoofed it to Sands Pointe. There was, he learned, no work. He grabbed sleep under tarps on a wharf. In desperation, dad decided that he must return without taking any of the five dollar grub stake borrowed from Mr. Dodd. He would return it whole, if it meant walking clear back to Monon, the small town that was his home. In time, in the Army Air Corps he was aboard the Queen Mary bound for a cold Atlantic crossing to England and a World War. Any job search in which I have ever engaged is luxurious by comparison. He and mother spent the rest of their lives insuring we children had a good home.

Following high school, I attended college for a semester and joined the Marines for four years. Enlisted. I learned a lot in the Corps, but the important thing in my instruction to you, is I completed my contract with the Marine Corps honorably and even with some rank. I had learned commitment, self discipline, how to work and especially how to wait. You do not need to join the Marines to learn that. Each of us like my dad has overcome personal difficulties that lend to this skill of work, self discipline and focus. After the Marine Corps, I finished with college and moved from Georgia to the heart of the action, New York City. I had saved four hundred dollars. A fortune compared to dad's five dollar grub stake back in 1931.

Fortunately I had an old Marine buddy there in the city that took me in and lent me his couch not knowing how long I would stay. It was the late Sixties and my savings quickly dwindled, disappearing into a Greek restaurant down the street from my buddy's apartment. The moment arrived when I knew I would have to return home to Georgia, or begin looking for a job in the big apple. I began looking for a job.

Hardly knowing my way around yet I used the bus and subway. I found myself climbing wooden steps to an employment agency on Forty Second Street, then a very smarmy part of town. The office still had 1930s furniture and gold lettering on the window of the brown door. The agent wore a brown suit and a wide brimmed fedora. He smoked a cigar. I sat before him, with windy spaced objectives, design, advertising, trips to exotic locations, business trips. I ended up walking to a studio on East 44th street. Two partners ran a photo retouching studio. They needed a messenger boy. I was determined to get a job. I guess they figured why not, so I was hired. \$1.50 an hour- forty hours a week. Then I learned from Freddy Dong the other messenger, about the contract. If I quit, I would owe the agency the entire fee. If I stayed the term of the contact, the studio would deduct a percent of the agency fee from my pay each week until it was fully paid. The term of the contract was six months. There would be no turning back. Realizing my ignorance Freddy laughed his ass off. The next morning the owner gave me my first task. *"Hey boy, take this up to J. Walter Thompson and give it to Vinny Guadalli. 22nd Floor, over Grand Central. Okay boy?. Capich?"* Every day at around four in the afternoon a retouch artist would yell "Got a buck?" I'd gather money from the other artists. Then, *"Hey boy, bottle of Wolfschmidts."* I'd hurry down to the liquor store to fetch the office's afternoon cocktail.

One time, I met a beautiful girl. She had some business at one of the agencies. I met her in the lobby. She carried a large folio similar to what I was delivering for the agency. I asked her to lunch. When she agreed I suggested we meet in front of an art gallery on Madison Avenue. This is where I usually grabbed a hot dog or frankfurter as it was called in New York. At lunch time, I waited around until I saw her coming down the street. When she arrived I suggested we have hot dogs and stepping to my friends hot dot stand, she stormed off. Guess she hadn't figured out that I was just a messenger boy.

I have covered three important elements in the job hunting business; the decision to begin looking for a job, the tools used to find jobs, and people. I was deeply concerned about how long I would be welcome on my buddy's couch. I had nearly run out of money-eating fried rice from a container for every meal. The best pressure to find a job is the absolute need for income. The job hunting devices then were employment agencies and the city newspapers. I ventured to some newspaper ads but many took me far away in a subway system that found me catching the train back to Manhattan from Far Rockaway! You use internet sources today like *Monster*, a device that further insulates employers from job seekers. So in the year 1969, I decided on employment agencies in town. *"..paste up artist mid town- fee paid"* The third element is people. Finding a job means meeting and talking with people about the job and yourself. There's even a web site for a hundred thousand dollars per year and up job seekers. For two of my best jobs, I was hired after interviews obtained by head hunters, or employment agencies.

There are three types of businesses. Private, Partnership, and Corporation. Each have specific legal rules, but the Corporation is very popular because its rules protect the principal's or owners private assets from liability or law suit because of bad practices or behavior. It's like a legal umbrella. A non public corporation can offer stocks to raise vast sums of money. But a corporation does not have a soul, it can not feel or express empathy, it does not cry, or be proud of its children when they graduate from a school. It doesn't sing or go to church. It doesn't delight in the fragrance of a lovely spring morning. A corporation by its very DNA just keeps on making money and adjusting strategy if it is not making money and gaining power. For this reason, corporations need to be regulated.

Many successful corporations in America actually treat employees well, by providing health benefits and a good wage, decent hours, and a well developed set of expectations and training. A declining number provide a pension. A 401K plan, even if contributory is not a retirement account for low income workers. It is simply a savings account. Corporations have no moral compass only a fear of the law. The greatest wealth and power in America today, aside from the Federal Government is concentrated in the most powerful corporations. So, there are people or human beings, and there are corporations. The two are not synonymous. The people's power in America exists in one man one vote, the law at any given time, boycott, unionization and cooperative. With the absence of any of all of these, the people have no power. The balance between pursuit of human productivity in corporations and the power of the individual is a changing dynamic force.

My forty year career in business began with this messenger job. Each move I would make from that little job was either parallel- still making \$1.50 or \$2.75 an hour I forget – or a

slight increase. A year here, two years there, looking always looking, and at the same time producing for the boss with hard work. I gave him exactly what he wanted. One writer has stressed the importance of cheerfulness on each job you get. In dealing with people, the primary source of all opportunity, an employee who undertakes the most menial the most insulting task cheerfully will be remembered. For more insulting tasks perhaps, but sooner or later another element will enter the picture. Pain.

Where there is no pain there is no opportunity. Where there is no pain there is no problem. Where there is no pain there is probably no job. In the midst of the economic mess we are now in, there is nothing but pain. The two owners in the little studio, a partnership, had pain. They needed a dependable messenger. I fixed their pain for six months. When I announced that I would be leaving for a larger studio over on Madison Avenue, one of the big Italians came up to me, right in my face and said, "*Hey boy, you run in to a problem over there, you can come back okay?. Okay, good luck boy.*" I thought he was going to hit me. They never used my first name. As I worked each day I would try here and there, asking questions. What is that job like? What is that business like? How much do they make? Then boom, the Studio on Madison Avenue. Still a messenger plus a little paste up ad work on the drawing board but still down there with the pigeons on Lexington and East 44th. If only in address, I was moving up. A young lawyer might search for pain in other firms he visits during an internship. Ask questions, and every time you leave a job take something you learned with you.

Many rejections may mean you have seen many people. Not exactly. Mailing resumes is like mailing book or essay manuscripts. Most are never even read. Whether mailing, emailing or posting on the internet job markets or making cold phone calls or even personal cold calls (*This place is really busy. What kind of driver, book keeper, inventory clerk, dispatcher, or attorney are you looking for?*) An interview will likely begin with a screening phone call. (Make sure your answering device is professional and in working order!) Practice interviewing alone. Talk out loud about yourself *alone* in your car, in your room, in your shipping crate shelter.

Imagine you are speaking with an interviewer. The busy interviewer has an image of the successful candidate. In your answers, being yourself, *you will present yourself*. But most important you are searching for the pain. Why did they want to see you? What is being said to suggest you might be the candidate. "*I really appreciate this opportunity to meet with you. This looks like a great place to work. Was there something in my resume that caused you to give me a call?*" Smile. Be careful with this. If the place looks like hell you'll sound like a bull shitter. Try, "*This place is busy, interesting.*" Or "*Your business looks interesting*" Do your homework and know something about that business before making such statement. Link your past experience with a fact, "*I did some marketing research part time in my senior year.*" Do not script. Do have a conversation.

If you can get a hint of the pain, you might begin to enhance that part of you that can fix the employer's pain. A harassed business owner once told me after such a question. "*Well, I got a bunch of animals out there. I need someone to manage them. We call it the*

zoo.” he said glancing out over the office. His pain was real. His questions to me were to determine if I could fix his pain. He watched me very carefully. This occurred many years and many jobs after the messenger gig in that little studio on East 44th Street. But pain never changes.

I have mentioned your desire to work, the ways you get an interview, your attitude, your willingness to begin at the beginning, and the importance of other people. The numbers game, the more people you see-not send resumes to or email- the better your chances of finding the pain and presenting yourself as the fixer of pain, properly conclude this snap shot. You will leave many interviews with the impression that either there was no pain, or the interviewer did not quite understand his or her own pain. It went well but nothing happened. Flaky city. One boss required me to interview all of the time, even if we didn't need anyone. If I found someone I really liked he'd ask me who we should fire to make room for a new hire. That's staffing. So timing is critical. *“We needed a guy just like you, but we hired him yesterday.”* Sorry no cigar.

Test question; what is one indicator of attitude? How you dress for this golden interview opportunity will present you as a product ready for sale. Failure in this area, will nullify all of the other preparations you have taken. Of course a carpenter journeyman would likely not show up in a suit. Dress for your part. During those early New York days, as a hippy skier type, I met my wife who marched me to a high end clothier in lower Manhattan where I spent every nickel I had, and some of hers, on two very fine suits. Keeping the same disciplines learned along the way, I began building a business sales career that lasted for over thirty five years. My last job continued for nearly thirty years!

Perhaps you are a new trade school, high school graduate, a college graduate or perhaps you are Veteran returning from the hideous experience of war. Perhaps you are older. Many are now leaving graduate school but all are swimming in the great sea of unemployment. Whichever of these bags you carry it is important to remember your past experiences are part of who you are now. Combat veterans especially must transition a very difficult period of adjustment. But for everyone, this very moment is a ledge upon which you now rest. You can not go back; you can not sit upon this ledge of unemployment for long. You must prepare to lean into the task of finding a job. If a farmer must sow and harvest to survive, so must you. The view into the unknown is scary. I once stepped off of a ski gondola high in the Austrian Alps. Ten or so tentative skiers stood on this platform of ice and blowing snow. The drop off was unnerving for the best intermediate skier. There was a sign in ten languages. *“Achtung! Achtung! Move off immediately. Do not remain on the platform. Move off immediately!!!”* Our guide led us down the long treacherous glacier as we followed like little ducks. Inside we had what it took to be successful. The little success enhanced our confidence. My little jobs lead to greater jobs, greater opportunity, more responsibility, always searching and fixing the pain that my employer might avoid. This is a life long quest.

Successful careers end sooner or later. Mine ended when my company was sold. There are never any guarantees. No one owes you a living. If I hadn't pursued higher ground along the way, I would have missed this great opportunity. In the end, one morning alone

in my house I watched out the window as a garbage truck dumped twenty five years of files and know how into the truck and hit the compress lever. The thin air and three piece suits and wingtips disappeared and soon, still having a mortgage to pay, I was on the floor of a credit card call center, a bottom feeder. As night shift supervisor, I watched huge bus loads of hopeful new hires from the city taking their seats, many for the very first job. The great dialers were cranked as the call center dialed up America. The floor boss yelled "Get on the phones!" agents put on their headsets and heard the calls hitting their ears.

"Hi Mr. Fleisher? This is.."CLICK, the caller would hang up and the next call would hit, seventy, eighty calls an hour.

A young man turned to me, looking up from his screen. "*They won't listen? They won't stay on the line.*" he said.

I pulled up a chair. "*Go unavailable.*"

"*Thirty six, get back on. Why are you unavailable?*" yelled the floor boss. I motioned that I needed a moment with the agent. "*Hurry up!*" His ruffled suit might have been purchased from a thrift store. He wore sneakers. He had tears in his eyes. He needed this job.

"*It's normal. You are doing nothing wrong. You'll get around seventy calls per hour. We only expect you to open new credit card applications with just two of those. Just two. You sound great. You are searching only for the person that really needs a card.*"

I walked away. After an hour or so, I walked near this agent and he wouldn't let me pass. He had an enormous smile on his face. "*I got two! Two!*" he said. His rate of pay was eight dollars an hour as I recall.

Understand the game. The principals at Fortress, those trusted with the integrity and operation of the public corporation knew the game and surely had a clear vision of the game at the very moment Fortress was created. With each action they took, before any transaction they knew exactly how much of the public, investor, and transaction fee funds would go back into Fortress and their own pockets, even if it was paper. Information technology has become so fast, so precise; model scenarios can be run pro forma (ahead of time to see possible results), if a smart person is at the key board. Their actions, legal, illegal, prison time, perhaps still debatable in courts of law, brought up three cherries again and again and billions upon billions cascaded down the metal chute into their pockets. Whatever business you enter, know the game. Respect the law.

An interviewer will look for your ability to get the picture. Presenting ample evidence in your resume will help the interviewer find a fit between you and the open spot in the organization. A young lawyer's first job experience will have some kinship to a welder, carpenter or office worker. In each case he or she is joining an organization needing a special set of person skills. Look around at existing employees, how they are dressed and their conduct. Recon before you go in. Probe on how you might fit and what you have done that might fix their pain.

"*So my statistic projects will help you in the productivity area here?*"

You must be prepared for the cautious interviewer. "*You were only one year at Acme Tool, (or Swiss Bank USB) what happened?*" "*You really have no extensive work record. Talk with me about that.*" Anticipate these questions and practice solid responses. The interviewer may not feel these to be important issues after seeing your

expertise in multi layered Excel for example. But he wants to know if you will stick around after he invests time and energy in training you to his company mantra. Believe me, the pain from employees who quit after a grueling training process is palpable. An employer might get stung once by this experience, but his interview skills will carefully probe and watch for the song birds. Employee and employer productivity interests are a bell shaped curve, the extremes being poor productivity and vague expectations opposed by workers so run into the ground by productivity expectations that a dangerous atmosphere results.

Once, a vice president called me in to his office. He asked me as floor supervisor, how our employees know if they had done a good job when they left for home. I fumbled with the answer and not being satisfied he suggested we begin to build a system of metrics on work done between clock in and clock out, adjusting for lunch and breaks. A manager should be able to look at numbers or metrics that reflected what Johnny Jones or Joe Dokes did between arriving and departing the job. A percentage of time was spent a task X, task Y and task Z. A total of XYZ would or should equal the total time worked. *Great care was given to determine how much time it would be reasonable to expect these tasks to take.* Soon rankings were posted and employees that previously hadn't the foggiest idea of their performance began to compete for positions on the productivity rankings. At no time was safety, employee health, or employ dignity sacrificed for expectation. If a corporation digging for coal sets expectations that sacrifice employee safety, dignity and health that corporation should be held legally responsible for the consequence. Regulation.

The final element I relate to you is time. If you are to penetrate the great wall of failure and rejection, you must be prepared to go however far, stay however long and struggle with whatever obstacles to schedule the interview and get hired. If you look long and hard enough you will see the pattern and find the pain. You may find pain that you can not fix. But sooner or later you will find that moment where your interviewer flashes a glance of interest, of trust. You might be offered a tour of the work place or a cup of coffee in the break room both of which are what sales professionals call a "buying signal". Be aware of your body language. Be open, relaxed but no slouch, formal but friendly, light eye contact. Don't stare. A second interview may follow but you are about to be offered a job.

You should set a goal of obtaining one or two interviews each week. The higher the income, one interview per month might be more realistic. Register with part-time agencies. Take part time work, but leave time for job hunting. The two together could be a sixty hour week. Of course, a sloppy misspelled or soiled resume should never be presented. As an interviewer, I used the resume, as a guide line for the interview. Accounting, one on one the candidate's work history year by year, month by month, and scoring 1-10 notating potential for success in the performing the job available. For scores eight and higher, a follow up interview were scheduled.

Today's office and factory environments are keenly tooled by the Human Resources science. The objective is non confrontation and political correctness. The purpose is to keep the company out of expensive litigation. Be prepared to blend with the culture you have joined. I recently heard a disturbing story about a woman who had placed a small American flag and a small picture upon her desk, mementos from her son a soldier in Afghanistan. Because of a complaint from other anonymous workers, she was ordered to remove the flag and the picture. On a daily basis, her son faced death, dismemberment and horrifying psychological trauma in the service of this country, its people and its corporations, yet company policy ruled against public display of any sort. As a former Marine, a Vietnam Veteran, I find such disconnect reprehensible. But if I need that job, I would suck it up and take heed of the rules and go about the work cheerfully. It would be a battle scar I would carry proudly and quietly.

Once you are hired and working, close up your war room, put away your exacto ad knife and paste up book, coffee pot, night lamp, appointment calendar, job folder on your computer desk top, and get to work. You may work for one or thirty years, (your goal should be at least two years) but sooner or later you will need these skills and mind sets again for another search. I hope they are few or many, as opportunity tends to launch us to higher ground and sometimes richer coffers.

Regarding the companies in which you seek employment, the clamor today for regulation of the secret high stakes gambling with hard earned investor money, in the form of derivatives, instruments which draw the curtain on accountability, is very much in order. Imagine if one law was passed to require every corporation to return to the historically sound discipline of double entry book keeping. Removing the fox from the chicken coop. Any good CPA team could come in audit the books and report the findings. The company is clean or there is a smell of dead fish. One recent expert stated the deals and workings of investment banking are so hazy and complex even the CEOs don't understand what's going on. Regulate them!

The first day I walked into that little instrument company off the dirty garbage strewn industrial back streets of Brooklyn I remember looking passed the switchboard operator, "*Edward Weck and Company, May I help you?*" through a window into the main floor. I saw hundreds of accountants in white shirts, each wearing white sweat cuffs, performing manual cost entries into large ledger books on the latest run of instruments. The role of the computer and the speed of data management have made obfuscation and allusion much easier, even an art. A simple Excel extension can be set to generate the number five for every entry of the number two, thousands, millions, billions. Restoring America to double entry hard work would mean severe penalties, including the closing the doors, if an accounting firm can not produce a quick sound audit. Fix it or file buster.

Millions of small companies would pass the test today. It is the minority of very large companies, banking and financial that would begin to crumble under such regulation. Generally, in analyzing any hypothetical performance index, some individuals or companies will rank lower to middle range. This reflects some function range of human output. Some meet expectation, some range as average, while others fall toward the

bottom of the ranking. In every case, company or individual, *extremely high numbers are suspect*. If Little Johnny Jones and Joe Dokes (those old fictional school house guys I never met) or AIG or Fortune, or Goldman Sachs are posting (or hiding) some spectacular numbers. We need to know and understand why. What is Johnny Jones doing to get those numbers?

Here in the Spring of 2010, the economy is improving. Our President and his administration are a welcome change, support them. Things will get better. I wish you good ski, happy job hunting, and a fruitful satisfying career in whatever endeavor you seek. In the Marine Corps there used to be a saying. "The best duty station is the next one." After all, it is our new graduates, our returning veterans, and our trade school and high school graduates, who will get this country moving again. Not the fat cats, the quick dealers, the manufacturers of derivatives, but lean cats. Notice the dudes on the show, "*Pimp My Ride*." Snake and the gang, or Monster Garage: How skillful they are. How beautiful their craft. Counter to grim corporate rule over employees, people want to do good work. They will do magnificent work, *if reasonable expectations are explained and trained*.

Do not forget the people element of my instruction. It is the most important. All things being equal, if they *like* you and are convinced that you can fix their pain and get along with their team, they will hire you. You know that last job I got, the one that lasted for over thirty years? I learned a few years after joining the company that the executive who hired me was a Marine Corps veteran, an officer, who had survived the WWII battles of the Pacific war. He never said a thing about it. Ever. There was something in my resume that suggested to him that I was the right man for the job, a good risk. I could fix his pain. You will never know unless you try. Take the first steps. Good luck. Now get out there!

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