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Panel: Age Discrimination Issues in Higher Education - Handout: Ageism and the Job Hunt (E. Hoenigman Meyer)

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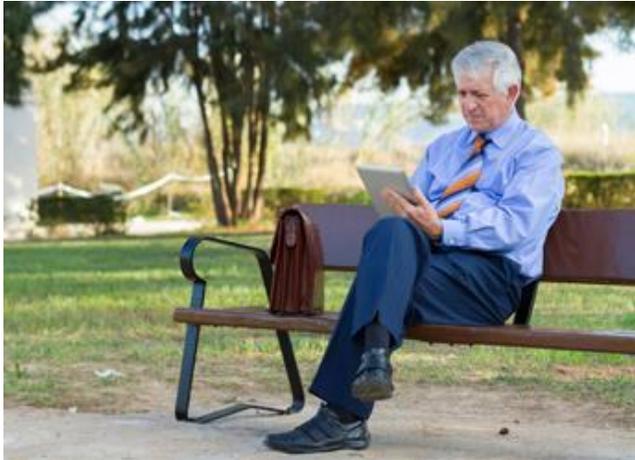
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Ageism and the Job Hunt

Career Tools | by Eileen Hoenigman Meyer
Monday, June 27, 2016



Ageism is a mounting concern domestically and abroad. The **World Health Organization (WHO)** goes so far as to say: "Ageism may now be more pervasive than sexism or racism. Ageism - discrimination against a person on the basis of their age - has serious consequences for older people and societies at large. Ageism can take many forms, including prejudicial attitudes, discriminatory practices, or policies that perpetuate ageist beliefs."

This is a critical time to examine the problem, because the global population is aging. **According to WHO:** "The number of people aged 60 years or older will rise from 900 million to 2 billion between 2015 and 2050." This represents an increase

from 12 percent to 22 percent -- nearly a quarter of the world's population will reach or surpass age 60 over the next three decades.

In the U.S., many seasoned professionals want to, and in many cases need to, retain employment longer than was once customary. The **Bureau of Labor Statistics forecasts:**

"From 2012 to 2022, the overall labor force will continue to age, and BLS projects that the number of workers in the 55-years-and-older group will grow by 28.8 percentage points, more than 5 times the 5.5-percentage-point growth projected for the overall labor force. The older group's share of the total labor force has been on an increasing trend since 1992 . . . BLS projects that the share will increase further, to 25.6 percent in 2022."

Institutions of higher education have long been trail blazers in their inclusivity practices. As employers, they frequently go beyond what other institutions offer by educating staff to identify the complexities of institutionalized discrimination and the intricacies of serving diverse populations.

But how does ageism fit in with this diversity work and how can more-seasoned candidates emphasize the value of their experience and avoid being negatively categorized because of ageist assumptions?

Challenge Biases

Many university professionals will recognize that challenging the biases we harbor is a necessary first step in diversity training. When it comes to ageism, we don't have to look deeply to recognize that ours is a culture that disproportionately values youth over maturity.

Globally, the market for anti-aging services and products amassed \$281.6 billion in 2015, and it's **expected to increase** to \$331.3 billion by 2020. Americans, and seemingly our international counterparts, are bombarded with the message that exhibiting the marks of our age is weak, ugly, and bad.

The resultant fear of being "found out" for going through a normal biological stage of development reflects a similar sense of self-doubt that members of other marginalized populations experience.

Just as we feel pressure to hide the marks of age on our faces, candidates may feel a similar pressure to obscure the marks of experience on their resumes by couching professional histories that "out them." A robust professional track record should be an accomplishment; instead, many job candidates find it relegates them to "overqualified" status. They are left to wonder if "overqualified" translates to "too expensive," "likely to bolt at another opportunity," or is it simply a polite way of saying "too old?"

Discuss Ageism

While many institutions of higher education have centers on campus that deal with civility, diversity, and inclusion, some feature ageism less prominently than the core diversity topics they discuss. So job candidates, staff members, faculty, and non-traditional students who may experience ageism may also feel alienated on campus.

Human resources guru and Forbes contributor Liz Ryan echoes the World Health Organization's observation, but on the domestic front. **She writes:** "Age discrimination is everywhere. I hear more examples of age discrimination than I hear about sex discrimination, racial discrimination, and every other kind put together."

If ageism is as globally prominent as WHO asserts, and also has the domestic implications for job seekers that Ryan asserts, then why wouldn't it be a more frontline topic when it comes to diversity and inclusion?

In an article Sarah Raposo and Laura L. Carstensen wrote for the "Journal of the American Society on Aging," the authors note: "Compared with the immense amount of literature on racism and sexism, surprisingly little empirical research has been conducted on the ramifications of ageism."

Despite its prominence, ageism doesn't hold the place it should in the diversity conversation. Ageism is a reality that complicates life for many Americans. Job seekers are particularly vulnerable. They need trained allies to help them navigate these challenges and to help them advocate for change.

The Beauty of Experience

Ageism is a reality. It's important for job seekers to be aware of this, but also to focus on their unique strengths in the job search. Soft skills such as resilience, communication skills, interpersonal skills, the ability to work on a team, adaptability, and problem-solving skills are in high demand. These abilities are commonly the bi-products of experience.

Raposo and Carstensen note, "Relative to younger adults... older adults are more emotionally stable, less likely to experience anger or fear, and more likely to be interested in making meaningful contributions. In addition to having more knowledge and expertise, older people generate wiser responses to emotionally charged interpersonal problems and solutions for intergroup conflicts... Such qualities hold great potential for workplace productivity and cohesion..."

Expert tips for Seasoned Pro's

Consultant, author, and speaker, Barry Maher has appeared on the "Today Show," "NBC Nightly News," and others. He's been featured in The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The London Times, Business Week, and USA Today. Maher advises:

"Older applicants need to deal with the negative perceptions of age and to stress the positives they've picked up because of experience. Ideally, they should show that age and experiences make them stronger, even in those very qualities the employer associates with youth. But they should never do it defensively, they should always do it positively, if at all possible raising the issue themselves rather than letting it lie there as an unspoken problem.

I also recommend that older applicants address the ageism issue even in their cover letter or cover email to their resume, though there they should do it more obliquely, stressing their positives: their energy, how they're keep current, the value of their experience, etc."

Although the data on ageism may seem daunting, experience matters. So does building awareness and bolstering scholarship on issues of ageism. Institutions of higher education are uniquely positioned to lead this initiative through research, education, and hiring practices and policies.

- #Career Advice
- #Career Stages and Transitions
- #Diversity and Inclusion
- #Job Search Advice
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Debra Baker • 8 months ago

I have been battling ageism trying to get into grad school to earn my PhD. Not once have my qualifications been called into question but I am frequently asked why I want to do this at my age. And that is far better than the people that reject me without even interviewing me.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



SPALLEN47 → Debra Baker • 8 months ago

Debra, I am saddened, but not totally surprised, by your experience. I don't know how old you are, but I was (thankfully) warmly welcomed into a PhD program at age 57! And, yes, I was asked, 'why now?' -- apparently my response was sufficient. Keep trying -- you might have to consider schools outside your 'personal comfort zone'. Keep trying -- there is no age limit on academic aptitude! You likely have more years of credible experience than many other applicants have years of life -- use it!!!

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



rhill → SPALLEN47 • 8 months ago

agree completely

^ | v • Reply • Share >



barbarawhitaker89 → Debra Baker • 8 months ago

it makes me so sad though to know that I am qualified for the job and not even given a chance because of my age. Most recently I received a rejection letter that stated, " everybody enjoyed speaking with you." as if I were a side attraction. It has really discouraged me. My recent MBA is doing me no good and I am sad.that corporate America is full of ageism. Someday, they too will be my age.

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



rhill → barbarawhitaker89 • 8 months ago

that's the point i've always made too, even when I was much younger. But it seems to be lost on many of these self-absorbed clueless people.

^ | v • Reply • Share >



Bruce Hoppe → barbarawhitaker89 • 8 months ago

On the same note. I was once told at the conclusion of an interview for a volunteer coordinator position, "we enjoyed hearing your stories about VISTA." It seemed so dismissive, It was as if I was some quaint yarn spinner reminiscing about the good old days, as opposed to a professional putting the status of volunteerism in an important historical context for their benefit.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



fhcgsp → Debra Baker • 8 months ago

I was one told by a rather young admin that I was too old to be considered as a Ph.D. Candidate. "It's a business", she went on very confidently. "We can't get enough out of you at your age." Nice, right?

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



suaverique → fhcgsp • 8 months ago

I wonder how much they were getting out of her at her age? Maybe, I should not ask that question?

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



kkollowa → Debra Baker • 6 months ago

Go for it. I got my doctorate at 57 and have,several friends that have done it too in late 50s . Jobs are there in nursing programs for me.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Reckster • 8 months ago

Regarding the statement: "Institutions of higher education have long been trail blazers in their inclusivity practices.." I beg to differ.....

In their desire to increase diversity, most Universities I am familiar with will design their recruitment and search strategies to surface anybody but an older, more experienced person. In my experience, candidates simply do not fit within the target demographic. I am speaking now as a candidate, an executive and a member of many search committees.

7 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



minoan • 8 months ago

In "academia," age, politics, and to some extent, physical appearance are your main foes.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



cal35 → minoan • 8 months ago

Indeed, academia is not, as so many think, far from the 'real world' tons of pettiness on looks, and politics and aging, the topic here. One that I feel greatly now is the age divide being a lot related to the digital age divide. Colleges have swallowed hook line and sinker that tech is THE way to teach and that tech in the classroom is the silver bullet to finally solve all education problems. Now tech is a great way for those younger faculty to leverage against older faculty, being dismissive and cocky and arrogant about tech skills. Sadly there is not good evidence that tech in the classroom really solves anything from what I can see--students get worse and worse every year despite all the clamouring for more tech more tech. Tech is an issue that is one of the big wedge issues destroying the both the position of the senior professors, their self-esteem and their ability to contribute to a faculty (now divided technologically and age-wise.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



jonyz1119 → cal35 • 8 months ago

cal35...You said it all. During my graduate program I have argued that tech is a tool (to some extent) but not the wonder bullet for downward trend in education. In fact, I have posted that tech in itself contributes to this downward trend. The Tech Industries are second to the NRA, APAC, Pharmaceuticals, and lots other lobbyists in this country. The academic world has been hijacked by these tech companies and it is getting worse every day. Do not misrepresent me, TECHNOLOGY IS GOOD, but our schools have to reconsider its use in instructional delivery.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



MDP → jonyz1119 • 8 months ago

During my dissertation work I had to learn 3 different software programs in order to compile and analyze data from the study. I am 61 years old. I've had to show my younger research assistants how to use various web based functions..... I think emphasizing that anyone new to a system (college) will need to learn that system (Moodle, Blackboard, etc.) and that these are all learnable on line programs....and that you've mastered (state the names of these)...will aid in fighting that battle. I look at it this way- I have 15 years of productive service and research I can contribute and the advantage of practice in my field that maximizes the value and quality of what I do. Another option: Present, write, and consult if all else doesn't work out. Once you are known, others will want you. (P.S. My dissertation was on social networks.)

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



cal35 • 8 months ago

Having been on hiring committees I can attest to how this is a big factor in whittling down candidates. Some of the eldest members of my search committees blatantly just say "I'm not interviewing a 55 year old..." and ".Why is this guy changing jobs as his age...no, take him off the list...." . Unbelievable, and this behavior came from a 65 year old woman who espouses to be a 'feminist' and 'fair person' too.

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



rsiv → cal35 • 8 months ago

One committee asked me to fly out for an interview, and were very excited at my resume. However, to get an airplane ticket, I had to give my birthdate. The interview became a formal walk-through after that. Ever wonder why some places ask for your High School credentials? That's in case you don't list all your degrees--they can see how old you are. I have four degrees, and don't list them all because it dates me.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



rhill → cal35 • 8 months ago

I've heard those comments too; coming from (older) people who should know better.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Jazzpianist • 8 months ago

I can't speak for everyone, but I will say that a Masters in Jazz Studies from the New England Conservatory of Music, and over 30 years career experience as a professional musician hasn't "been enough" yet to get me a job in academia. I realize that there is a difference in perception between the "academic" (read PhD) of Music Theory, Music History, and Music Education, and the "applied" degrees (read DMA--Doctor of

Musical Arts) of Jazz, Applied (trumpet, trombone, piano, etc.) but as a professional who has been out making a living at this for over 30 years, I'd pit myself against any 27 year old or 33 year old doctoral candidate anytime, anywhere. I have more playing, composing, arranging, teaching, mentoring, leading, and yes, disciplining experience than most of those folks. And quite frankly, any discussion of "why do you want to do this at your age?" is absolutely ludicrous. I have active relatives doing a lot of things in their 70s, 80s, and 90s. Now...if the particular department, dept head, dean, provost, president, college, university, or conservatory, has an unacknowledged bias towards the "well-degreed" and lesser-experienced younger set vs. older, wiser, and more experienced candidates...well, shame on them. Quite frankly, if a lot of universities are doing this, then they're cutting themselves off from good candidates who have a lot to bring to the students. And if they're doing it "because we need more PhDs at this school as a selling point to students", that's pretty ludicrous too. Feel free to jump in and disagree with me if you like--we all have First Amendment rights and everyone deserves to have their say. Sincerely, Pete Harrison, MSgt(ret) USAF Bands, and Owner, Quality Music Services, Huntsville, AL.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



fhcgsp → Jazzpianist • 8 months ago

I have 3 masters degrees, all business related, and I can't get a reaching job. Not even an adjunct job.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



Dr Edith, PhD → fhcgsp • 8 months ago

I have four masters degrees, finishing my PhD and I am having a lot of difficulty obtaining adjunct or full time faculty positions

^ | v • Reply • Share >



Dr Edith, PhD → Dr Edith, PhD • 8 months ago

in addition to ageism, is ableism, which is discrimination against people with disabilities

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



rhill → fhcgsp • 8 months ago

that is so wrong and should not be happening. Good luck and keep trying

^ | v • Reply • Share >



Suzanne Cloud • 8 months ago

Academia is just as guilty of ageism as everyone else. I received my PhD at 53 years old and was NEVER seriously considered for a full-time teaching position once a department committee interviewed me in person. Of course, I was offered all kinds of low-paying adjunct positions. So, I stopped beating my head against the ivied gates and went into the nonprofit world. Best decision I ever made.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



Guy Davis → Suzanne Cloud • 8 months ago

Suzanne I had similar experience as you job searching at 58 years old. I have 23 years of experience in student affairs (career services) and after being laid off I did have a number of skype, phone and campus interviews. After 9 months no offers and then I figured it out. While search committees said they loved my experience, they didn't want my gray hair. I was too damn old, period. Like you I stopped banging my head on the wall and went to the non-profit sector. This is the best decision I ever made.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



Suzanne Cloud → Guy Davis • 8 months ago

Sorry you experienced the same thing, Guy, but we both know there are a lot of us out there who've been disdainfully sniffed at because of a few wrinkles. Yes, the nonprofit world can't afford to judge people by outward appearance - they go by what's in the heart. Good luck to you, and hooray for helping others!

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Victoria Clary • 8 months ago

My BFA in Photography and my MFA in Visual Communication, along with over 20 years of higher education teaching, plus 30 years of professional practice has gotten me nowhere in my job search. I am 64. I have received rejection after rejection, and no interviews from the 100s of applications for faculty positions. My credentials and experience are excellent. I am teaching Continuing Education classes adjunct. These are 5-6 week classes that meet once a week for a couple of hours. It's the best I could find.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Kornel Eva → Victoria Clary • 8 months ago

I think we need to get seriously organized and fight it

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Terry Kinton → Kornel Eva • 8 months ago

I agree.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



garybartanus → Kornel Eva • 8 months ago

Like Terry Kinton and rhill, I agree that it needs to be fought. Barry Maher (the consultant mentioned in the article) seems to be advocating for pushing back, too. I think the first step is definitely getting "seriously organized" as you said, Kornel Eva. The second step is to draw on the inspiration of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who has never been afraid to speak her mind and "educate" her peers. A third step might be to carefully choose a name for this organization...something that would grab people's attention and resonate with what all adults know is true. Unfortunately, my 60+ year old brain is stuck on a possible spin-off like "Mature Lives Matter," which probably offends some folks. (It's also too negative for people who have as much to offer as we do!)

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



mhossain2009 → garybartanus • 8 months ago

Very well said Gary! Justice Ginsburg spoke her mind about Trump and she is now backing off. Trump said something really bad (Since she is older) that her mind is shot and she should resign. If Trump becomes president, we're going to have an old president who discriminates against age. How's that for a change/

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



PattiJF → Kornel Eva • 8 months ago

I agree, too. We need to band together and fight it. One person commented that the attorneys said there is "no evidence." What about the testimony of everyone commenting here on this thread? And, this is Higher Ed, where people generally appreciate the experience and wisdom of more senior people. Out in industry, I think the situation is worse. Other forms of discrimination are equally subtle, and attorneys seem to find the evidence needed to fight

(and win) these discrimination cases. If there isn't enough 'evidence' for a single hire at a single firm, there certainly is enough combined evidence. If not the attorneys, then we get organized and fight at a political level. All the highly qualified people who are sitting at home idle is a huge waste of talent and in effect lowers our country's GDP.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



SS → PattiJF • 8 months ago

And, it is a double-edged sword. When the topic of ageism is brought to someone's attention they are frequently dismissive of the problem because you're viewed as just an older adult complaining, rather than as a well informed individual.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



suaverique → Kornel Eva • 8 months ago

Let's do that. And I have an idea. But, I must beg off for the moment. However, I will be return to this in a few hours. O.K. Please bear with me. Nice.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Erin Baker → Kornel Eva • 8 months ago

Count me in!

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



CDN → Kornel Eva • 8 months ago

AARP has been fighting for senior rights for decades. I think you should enlist the help of AARP because they have the name recognition, money, lobbyist, and millions of supporters to stand behind your issue.

Additionally, you can start a website similar to Glassdoor, where people can post their ageism experiences with certain universities or corporations, calling them out by name and shaming them into doing the right thing.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Kornel Eva • 8 months ago

Those who practice age discrimination will NOT want to experience it. Everything on this planet is done by a lot of screaming and pushing. Ageism will not get better unless people organize better themselves and fight it. The sad thing is that older people are very good workers, organized, responsible, dedicated and more humble. It is a shame that all these values are lost.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



rhill → Kornel Eva • 8 months ago

I couldn't have said it better.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Movie Blue Diving Suit → Kornel Eva • 7 months ago

Yes, we are humbler than ALL the young ones combined!

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Terry Kinton • 8 months ago

How can we fight this?

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



rhill → Terry Kinton • 8 months ago

I wish I knew

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



APersonwhoknows → Terry Kinton • 8 months ago

Pressure. More stories about this need to circulate. This is how change comes. Find that outlet. Pressure government. I recently got into it in a Women in Film and Video email thread as someone requested a "Young" professional. NO MORE. ALL LIVES MATTER ;) Even older ones. That is how change happens.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Erin Baker → APersonwhoknows • 8 months ago

We have to prove a pattern -formally write out our experiences, collectively attach them to an email, send them to every university, business and organization that we have collectively applied to, as well as every member of Congress, the Attorney General (at the federal and state levels), every governor, AARP, etc. We have to sign a petition and circulate it, getting other concerned individuals to sign. We need to get big media involved and interested so that Congress takes our petition seriously. We have to contact the presidential candidates, sending them any copy of any article concerning ageism and hiring practices.

I am 63 years old, having just finished my Ph.D. in 2015. Due to high GRE scores I got into 3 Ph.D. programs. However, only one was willing to give me a GA. The university was across the pond. Now, I am hugely in debt, can't even get a job interview, and am facing bias because of a foreign degree and my age. I have a hell of a lot of energy and am very willing to fight for our cause.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Arfmoogle • 8 months ago

I have been experiencing the same thing, and even though it is illegal, it is very difficult to prove. You need to have something in writing, or recorded, or witnesses who will come forward.

Imagine someone on the search committee saying, "Take her off the list, we don't want any feminists (or blacks, or gay, or Hispanic) here!" Someone would be outraged, would they not? But not in regard to age.

I finished my BFA at 56, and before I got my MFA (at 59) I applied for a job at a local educational game company. My portfolio and degree earned an excited phone call from the HR department. "Could you come in next Tuesday for an interview?" I was delighted for the opportunity, but then, they emailed me the next day to tell me the position was no longer available. A classmate of mine, a 22 year old told me a few weeks later that he got the job. He said they interviewed him a few days after my interview, and the position were cancelled.

The 22 year old and I both graduated with honors from the same program. My portfolio is geared more toward what the company does, and yet, he was hired. They even posted a similar job on their web site a few months later, but when I applied for it I got no response. As if I would want to work there anyway, right?

I called the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and filed a complaint, but nothing ever came of it. There was no proof that my age (my resume had work experience going back to 1980!) was a factor in their

[see more](#)



^ | v • Reply • Share ›



rhill → Arfmoogle • 8 months ago

This is a serious problem. The alternative is to give up, stop applying or retire when you don't want to. The irony is that I'm getting interviews for great jobs because of my background and experience, but sometimes that is precisely what ends up disqualifying you, because they then conclude that you're too old. It's something you can feel, but as many here have said, nearly impossible to prove, or I guess do anything about. I'm not going to stop trying, however.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Arfmoogle → rhill • 8 months ago

I'm not going to quit. I really enjoy teaching and I have a 7 year old daughter to think about (and I am 60!)

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Kim → Arfmoogle • 8 months ago

As Kornel and others have said, we need to get organized. Sex discrimination was covert a few decades ago (after explicit discrimination had been banned), but feminists and some lawyers developed strategies to combat that, such as using statistics and class-action suits.

I think the ACLU should be approached. In addition, there must be some politicians who would be supportive.

As for a name . . . what about Wisdom of the Ages?

or Fine Wine?

or Alpha & Omega?

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Arfmoogle → Kim • 7 months ago

What we need is an attorney. Preferably one that would be hungry to make a name for him or herself. Anyone know of one?

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Erin Baker → Arfmoogle • 8 months ago

With more examples like this, we can prove a pattern.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



rsiv • 8 months ago

I have become a seasoned professional, so to speak, and when finding myself pushed out by a younger Chair who favored the twenty-somethings he hired personally rather than those he saw as competition for himself, I decided to start peddling my resume. I defy anyone to find more than a handful of jobs out of all listings on HigherEd that aren't looking for an Assistant Professor or less. The one committee that actually agreed to talk to me at a conference looked at my resume and said, "Wow, you're waaaaay over-qualified for what we're looking for." When I suggested I would be willing to take a cut in rank and a cut in pay, the response was, "Oh, I'm sure you wouldn't be happy with that." Then the we'll-get-back-to-you. The problem is simple: budgets are being cut by getting rid of more qualified professors and replacing them with lesser qualified personnel they can pay less. It's simple math.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



rhill → rsiv • 8 months ago



exactly right

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