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# The Politics of Operations

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## The External Influences

- More than ever before:
  - Elected officials / governments are taking a far greater interest in our business
  - Bureaucracy is having a far greater influence on our operations
  - Media are now better informed than they've ever been
  - Community are demanding instant information and transparency across any and all areas of Government (including Security and Emergency Management)



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## The Key Challenge

Perhaps the biggest challenge we all face is maintaining the ***“trust and confidence”*** of the Community in which we serve, whether it be in delivering the day to day business or when managing catastrophic events.



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## Some Strategic Issues to Consider

### **Vision**

From the Objective to the Aspirational

### **Media**

They're not going to go away

### **Risk**

Understanding its limitations in leadership

### **Failure**

A good thing when handled well

### **Politics**

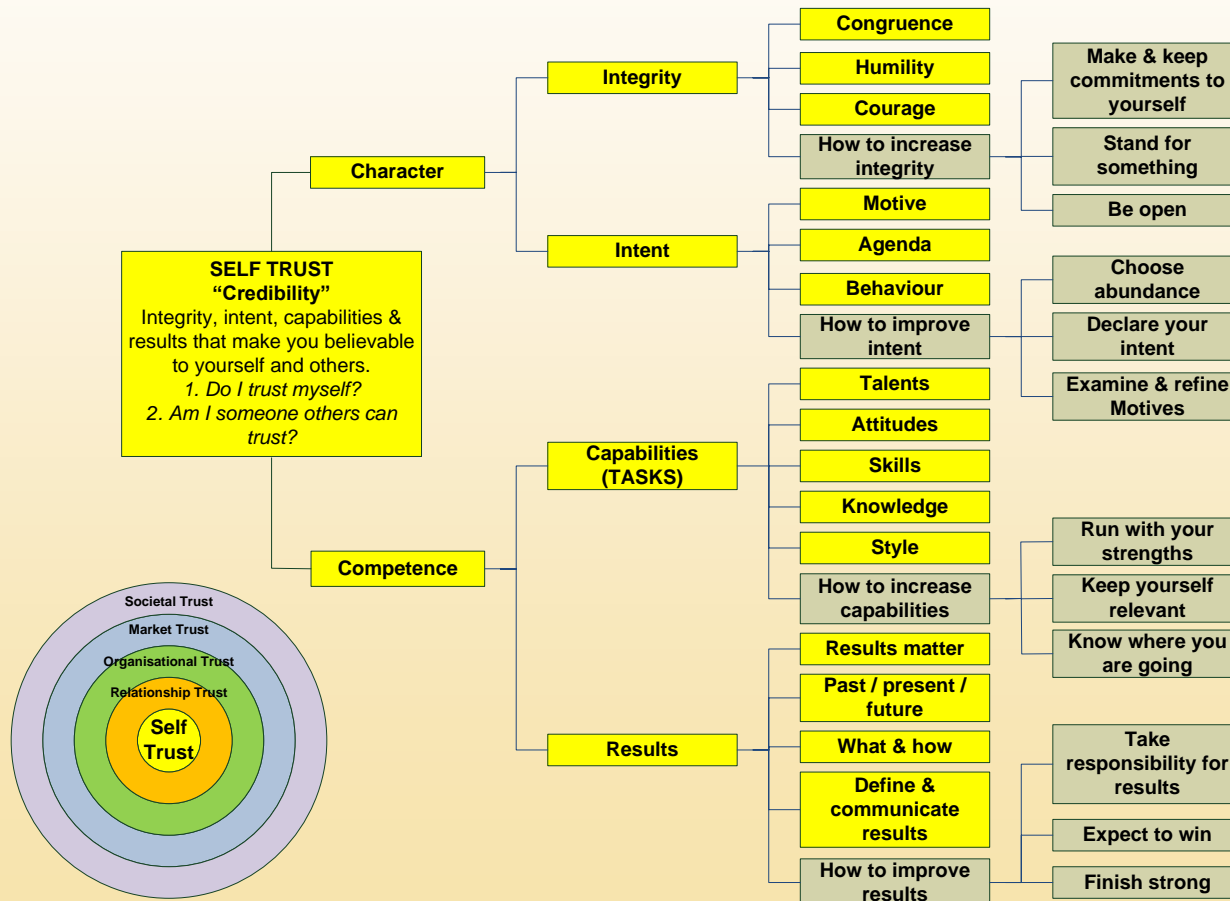
The need for astuteness

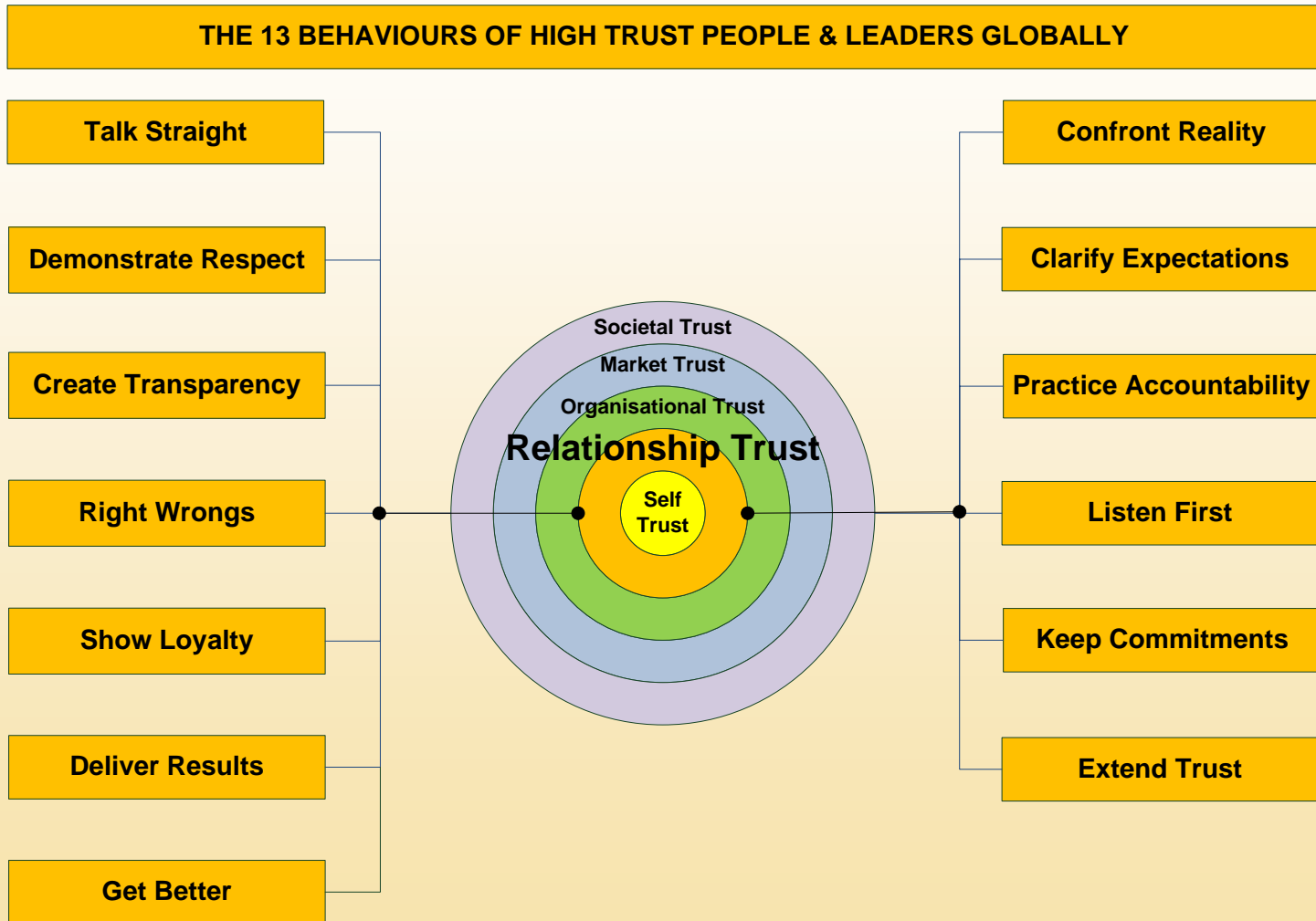
### **Resilience**

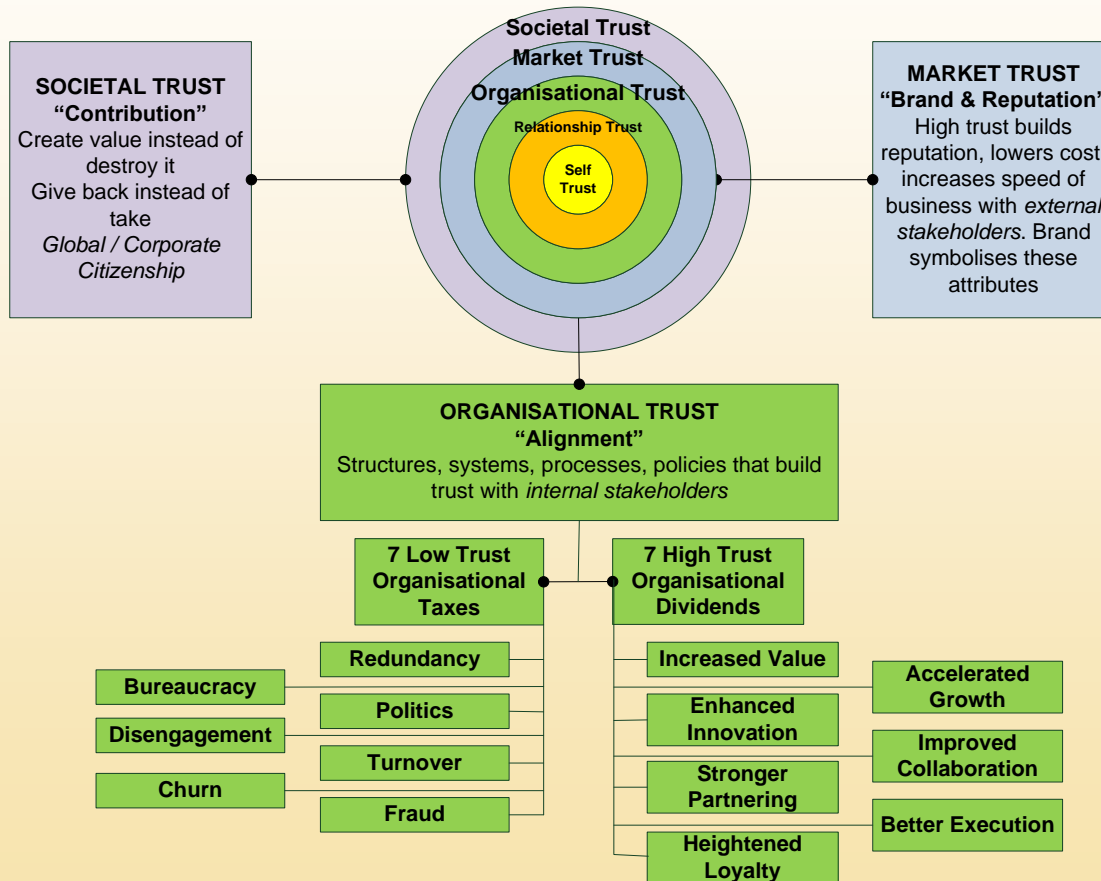
It's not about staying standing, its about how quick we get back up



# The Key Challenge – A Perspective on Trust









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# VISION

ACHIEVING A JUST AND SECURE SOCIETY

[www.ag.gov.au](http://www.ag.gov.au)





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## Vision

“The Trusted Agency for emergency Management in the ACT”

## Mission

Our Mission is to never lose sight of the simple fact that when a person rings “000” or “132500” they are having a bad day and they call us because they have “**confidence**” in us and “**trust**” that we will do all within our power and capability to make their day a better day, whatever the circumstance.



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## Canberra Fires of 2003 – A long road back to being trusted again

### This event highlighted:

- The extreme limitation of the effectiveness of our conventional capabilities
- The deep division between State / territory Jurisdictions and between Emergency Services about how to deal with the emerging problem
- Insufficient situational awareness of the unfolding event
- Insufficient appreciation of and capability to issue public messages and warnings

**But remember... The primary motivation of all concerned was to do the very best they could within the limits of their own internal and external resources**





## So, what have we done??

- Significant improvements in:
  - Governance (Law / Strategic Planning / Risk / Structure / Doctrine / Funding / Resources)
  - Openness and Transparency
  - Communication with the community
  - Operational planning
  - Technological capability
  - Media relationships
  - **However.....We won't really know how well we've done until the next major event**



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# RISK



# Do we, as a society, really understand or accept the consequences of Residual Risk?

Arguably, we are getting better at identifying this

**UNTREATED RISK**  
Hazard / Likelihood / Consequence

**TREATED RISK**  
\$ / Time / Resources / Commitment / Awareness

**RESIDUAL RISK**  
Resilience!  
Inevitability?

We are under pressure to do more with less here

Do we truly accept the notion of "shared responsibility"?

We still resist any possibility of this happening



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# The Victorian Bushfires of 2009

This event highlighted:

- Insufficient respect for the true potential of the nature of the hazard
- Insufficient unity between Emergency Services
- The extreme limitation of the effectiveness of our conventional capabilities
- Insufficient situational awareness of the unfolding event
- Insufficient ability to adequately warn the public and issue safety messages in a timely and accurate manner
- Our limitations in being able to properly read the warning signs, apply our collective imaginations and act accordingly (old thinking and old behaviours to a new problem)
- Our propensity to move straight to a blame environment
- **But remember... The primary motivation of all concerned was to do the very best they could within the limits of their own internal and external resources**





## Observations of the Victorian Bushfires

- Despite what the environment, the climate and the views of our own people were all telling us, and that is that something extraordinary was about to unfold, we kept doing things the same way!
- This picture had been building for a number of years.
- Our thinking, dominated by a propensity to see everything based upon risk (likelihood / consequence) became one of our greatest limitations.



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## Risk and Leadership

Increasing our skills in making decisions based upon a risk management approach is both appropriate and expected but as leaders we should never lose sight of the fact that we cannot negate risk, and in that space of residual risk there lies an inevitability that will stretch our leadership capabilities beyond our knowledge, skills, experience and imagination!





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## The Lesson?

Learn to anticipate the most improbable and unlikely scenario (Read the signs, constantly re-establish your context, rely on your knowledge, skills, experience, **imagination and creativity**)

Have the courage to communicate that potentiality and embed the necessary Operational planning, Governance, Structures, Systems, Processes, and Procedures to deal with the outcomes of such potentiality into your day to day business. (You'll be surprised how little true innovation can cost!)

Learn to **trust** your intuition, have the courage to say the thing that everyone is thinking (or no one else is thinking!) and no one is saying and then follow through

Ensure you have maintained the **trust** and **confidence** of each and every person (within and beyond your organisation) that you will rely upon to help get you through. **And that includes first and foremost the people you serve!**



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# FAILURE



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# Success or Failure?

## It depends on perspective and expectation

It could be argued that the underpinning theme of global politics and economics is that **“failure is not an option”** (for example: what is negative growth??? – LOSS!!)

However whilst ever society and its Government's maintain this view **“failure will always be inevitable”**

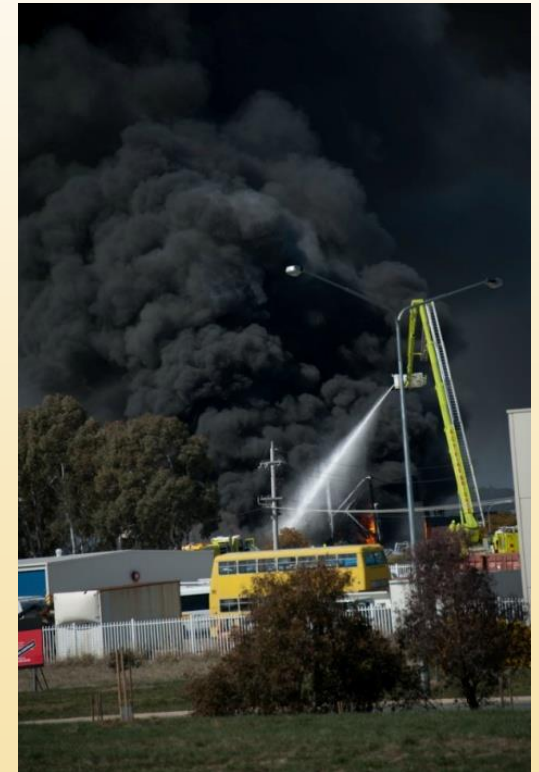


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# A Case Study of Success vs. Failure

## The Mitchell Chemical Fire





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## A Brief Overview of the Operation

- Time of Call: 2311 hours 15/9/11
- First unit on scene: 2320 hours
- 500,000 litres of oil containing Poly Chlorinated Biphenyl (PCB) and numerous drums of sodium metal on fire
- When combusted, PCB"s can produce phosgene
- 0115 hours 16/9/11 an evacuation order and alert issued for the suburb of Mitchell
- 0319 16/9/11 hours Alert issued at 0319hrs relating to an enlarged area outside the exclusion zone advising residents in the potential smoke path to close windows and shelter indoors.
- 0735 16/9/11 hours advice was updated and the exclusion zone reduced encompassing the suburb of Mitchell.
- 1800 hours 16/9/11 fire declared contained





# Glass half empty or glass half full? – Guess which?

## Success

- No public fatalities or injuries
- No detrimental environmental impact
- No fire fighter / emergency service deaths or injuries
- Fire contained to building of origin with minimal damage to adjacent exposures
- First Emergency Alert Campaign
  - 100% of numbers (22,600) dialled
  - 63% of text messages (1700) delivered
- Second Emergency Alert Campaign
  - 63% of text messages (52,700) delivered
- 38 Separate public updates issued over a 48 hour period



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# You Guessed it!

## Failure

- Second emergency Alert Campaign
  - 16% of numbers (13,784) answered
  - **80% of numbers not dialled (69,229)**



## How Did We Deal With It?

- We took responsibility early
  - We briefed the Minister as soon as we knew we had a problem
  - We foreshadowed to the Media that we needed to improve with the Alert System
- We committed to “getting Better”
  - Review of Doctrine
  - Upgrade of competency
  - Increased resources
  - Systems improvements
- We followed through with our commitments
- We managed the Politics (Commonwealth vs. Territory)

**Our Lesson?? – we exercised Humility**





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# Media



## So, who knows more than who?

- 5-10 years ago we could be confident that we, as emergency service agencies, knew more about an incident than the Community.
- With the advent of Social Media (YouTube, Facebook, Skype, Twitter, I-Phone Apps etc. etc. etc.) as well as the capacity for commercial media to stream events instantly there is a strong argument that suggests the tables have turned.
- ***The result, a crisis in trust and confidence.***



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# A Case Study example of Instant Media: The Gungahlin Bridge Collapse

## Incident Information

- Incident: #032091
- Date: 14/08/2010
- Time of call 13:52:03
- First Appliance on Scene: 13:59:23 (B9 from Gungahlin)
- First Media Call: 13:56 (approx)

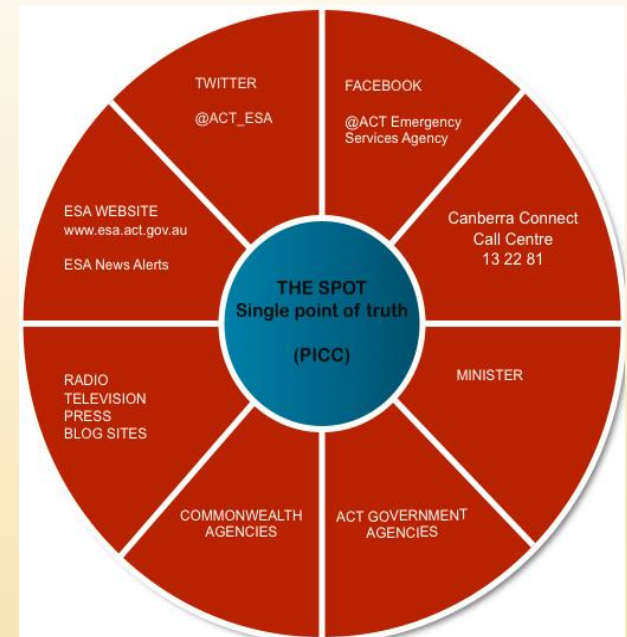
**In other words – The media were onto the incident before we had even arrived!!  
(and so was someone else!!)**





## How Did We Deal With It?

- We accepted that the World had now changed and that we were no longer the Supreme Masters of Operational Information
- We invested in upgrading our Public Website and introduced Social Media into our capability
- We listened to Government (the Ministers and Bureaucracy) and incorporated all of their information needs
- We engaged the Media in our capability development and strengthened our relationships with them





## Politics – Executive Government

- Politics is a rational process that ultimately seeks to find the compromise without sacrificing the principle.
- Ministers have an expectation of:
  - No surprises
  - Evidence based reports
  - Frank, fearless and politically contextualised advice
  - A common sense approach



## Politics – Administrative Government

- Alive and well in Australian Public Service
- Very few understand Command and Control
- Very few want to understand Command and Control!
- It is imperative they we engage them in as many aspects of our business as possible
- They have great influence over Ministerial decisions
- They do add value



## Politics - Organisations

- Get ready for insubordination!
- Find out who holds the real power (It will probably be an Executive Assistant)
- Understand and Respect the Human Resources and Industrial Relations Frameworks – They underpin the culture and provide the leadership tools to help you deliver the outcome



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## Resilience

A much bigger conversation for another day

- Mindfulness
- Acceptance
- Presence
- Humility
- Courage
- Personal Responsibility
- Forgiveness
- Compassion





## In Summary

- Strategic Leadership is both **Art** and **Science**.
- Its **Art** is to have the ability to constantly assess and re-assess the Political / Environmental / Social / Technological / Legal and Economic contexts and their relevance to any arising issue, to apply all of your accumulated knowledge / skills / experience and imagination, and in so doing, provide advice or make decisions, with the ultimate test being “does this make sense?”
- Its **Science** is to have in place all of the necessary Governance / Doctrine / Structures / Systems / Processes / Resources to give full effect to the outcome of any advice or decision
- In other words, it's not enough just to have a good idea, so don't just say you can do it, make sure that you do **do it!**



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**THANK YOU!**