



KEYS TO PERFORMANCE

HEALTH - FITNESS - SURFING



SURF
STRENGTH
COACH

SURF / MOVEMENT / NUTRITION / LIFE



“There are, as you read this, uncounted millions of people who now go through life without any source of real, vibrant kick. The legions of the un-jazzed. But surfers have found one way. God knows, there are other ways. Each to his special danger. Skiing is not enough. Sailing is near. Ski-jumping almost. Automobile racing has got it. Bullfighting makes you dead. The Answer is surfing.”

– Phil Edwards

If you surf, you “get it”. I don’t think anymore really needs to be said. For most of us, surfing is more than just a hobby. It’s an integral part of our life, our mental health, our stress relief, our fun. It’s part of our “health”, and it’s really damn fun.

With this guide, I want to give you some things to consider, tools, and methods to make sure you can keep participating in this really damn fun hobby called surfing. Maybe it will even help you get a bit better along the way,... catch a few more waves.

-Cris Mills

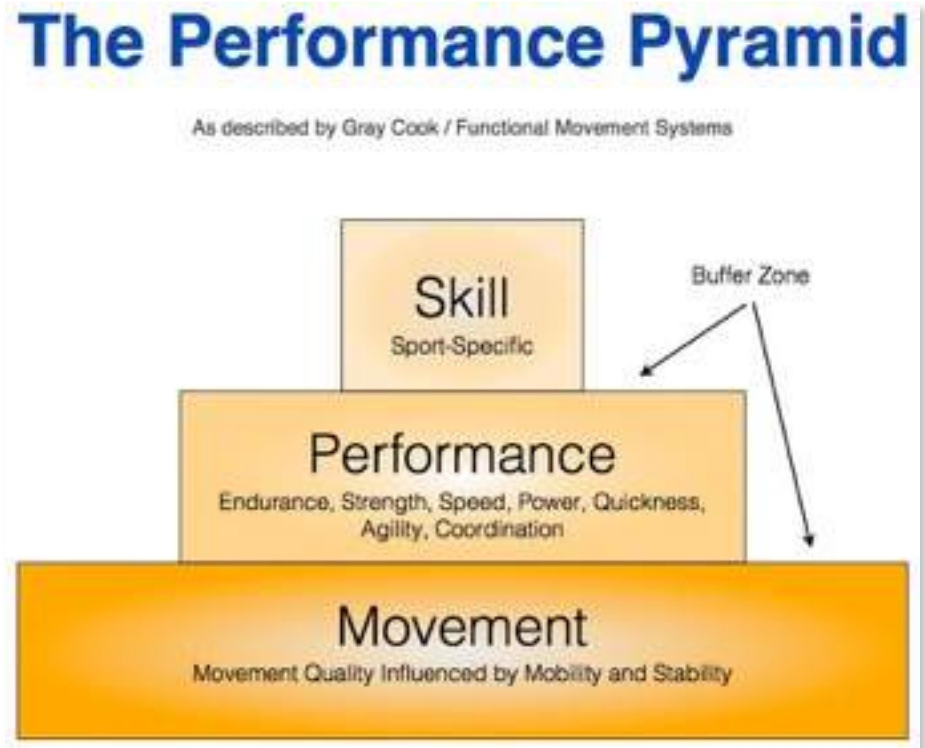
SKILL PYRAMID

Understand this concept. Surfing is a “skill”. It’s a ridiculously enjoyable skill, with most of us wanting to be better at it. You’re seeking skill improvement. Being active, mobile and pain-free, becoming stronger, getting powerful, better nutrition, these things provide a buffer so that you can continue to improve your skill. Ultimately, stay in the water.

Skill is improved in the water. Actual surfing. That’s it. Repetition, failing, learning, practice, and constant application, that’s the path to improved skill.

Get a technique coach along the way, get filmed, fix bad movement habits, and work on some technique. Surf as much as possible, and have fun.

What you can work on out of the water is improving your foundations of skill. Simply making sure you’re healthy, and you can move your body efficiently.



It’s really about improving your athletic capacity, making sure your body is healthy, and you can move well.

Are you weak? Lacking flexibility? Have no power or endurance in your paddling? Dealing with back pain or shoulder issues? Inflammatory joint issues? Carrying an extra 20lbs. and a beer gut?

Those issues limit your “athletic capacity”. They could potentially limit your time in the water, lead to some issues down the road, or just annoy the hell out of you while you surf. Most of those issues can be resolved with some diligence and occasional expert insight.

You should actively want to deal with this stuff, as ultimately it’s probably messing with your surfing. What we are really talking about is that it’s messing with your Health. Take responsibility for your body, and what you hope to do with it. It is your responsibility to stay active in life.



What I see as the real goal is that you need to become active and responsible for your health, and improving it. If you improve your overall health, it's going to help you surf. I see them as inherently connected.

What it truly comes down to is this:

If you improve your health, take an active role in improving yourself, bettering your body, continuing to move, you'll be a lot more likely to stay in the water, and keep surfing way past your 30's, 50's, and further..... and very likely get better.

1) JOINT HEALTH & MOBILITY

If you can't move, you can't surf. That's a pretty simple and straight forward concept. Surfing is a dramatically 3-dimensional sport, and requires full range of motion throughout the body. Modern life doesn't require much movement, bodies adapt to this lack of motion, and joints generally tend to "tighten" up. Sitting at a desk for 40-50hrs per week, and then expecting your body to go shred doesn't quite work.

I am going to keep this in the shallow pool of human anatomy, so don't sweat it, I won't go too deep.

There are some joints in the body that are supposed to move a lot, and others that aren't supposed to move as much. Ankles, hips, shoulders, thoracic spine, glenohumeral joint (shoulder), and wrist, are joints that generally should be quite mobile. This



concept is referred to as the Joint by Joint Approach, made popular by physical therapist Gray Cook and Strength & Conditioning Coach Mike Boyle

The very basics are this: A lot of people (especially the older crew or desk jockeys), don't move as well through the joints that should be able to move well. This tends to happen from lack of movement, previous injury, repetitive sport and life postures, it's a long list of possibilities.

Stiff hips, locked up ankles, an immobile spine, shoulders that are a bit wonky... you get the idea. This lack of mobility could lead to some injury, potential pain problems, and just not allowing you to move as well as you should.

Your Joints Need to Be Able to Move.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT JOINT HEALTH & MOBILITY

This could be a book by itself. There are in fact hundreds of books on this in various forms, probably more.

The very basic takeaway is this: **A lot of surfers need to work on their “flexibility”. You need to be able to move well, and do it pain free.**

Yoga, active stretching, self-myofascial release, dynamic mobility drills, hands on massage therapy or manual therapy, foam rolling, gentle stretching, rolfing, this is an expansive list of methods aimed at improving movement and joint range of motion. Don't worry if you don't know what some of those terms are.

The point is that there are numerous ways to improve your ability to move more efficiently. The key is finding a method that you get familiar with, and applying it consistently. Make improvement. This is a tool that you can, and should utilize for the rest of your life.

For most of you, getting familiar with basic stretching, tennis ball tissue release, foam rolling, and a bit of yoga can go a very, very, very long way. It just needs to be applied consistently over time. Improvement in joint range of motion and mobility doesn't happen miraculously overnight.

You've probably spent a lot of time sitting in the car, hunched at a computer, or neglecting your body for a long time.... results will take a bit of time, but they're absolutely attainable.

It's also a very good idea to get some professional insight and assessments along the way. Getting a clear of idea of where you're not moving very well, and where you may be moving too much can really help you get specific with what you should “work on”, and try and improve.

Yoga, once or twice per week with an experienced teacher is a great thing. The “experienced” teacher part is absolutely necessary, especially if you've had some injuries in the past, dealing with some current aches, or if you're really stiff and inflexible. Go mellow with it, slowly build a practice, and don't expect immediate gratification.

Foam rolling, or rolling on a tennis ball can make some dramatic improvements in how people feel and move. While the direct mechanism of how this self-myofascial release works isn't completely clear from a scientific standpoint, what we really do know is that it can, and certainly does help. Find your tight spots, roll around on restricted areas, work on trigger points. I can't stress how valuable this stuff can be. 5-15minutes, 2-4 times per week can make a big positive impact.



Stretching, get familiar with some key stretches that target specific muscle groups. Learn how to effectively stretch your pectoralis major and minor, latissimus dorsi, low back, hip flexors, quadriceps, hamstrings, and calves. That list could be longer, but it hits on the "generally" tight muscle groups.

Once you learn some fundamental stretches that isolate a muscle, progress into more dynamic stretching that utilize more full body mobility. The key is to work on your specific restrictions first, iron those out, and then progress to more dynamic movements or mobility drills.



Another hugely important aspect is this. If something hurts, go get it checked by a professional. If a joint isn't moving well, or something is causing pain, go get professional insight. Now. Right now. Stop putting it off. Invest in your body, and a deeper understanding of how to take care of it.

DO IT

Get into some yoga here and there. Start exploring some stretching and tissue release several times per week, and incorporate these tools into your weekly routine. Your body will thank you. 10-20 minutes, 3-7x's / week. It's easy. Do it whenever you have a chance.

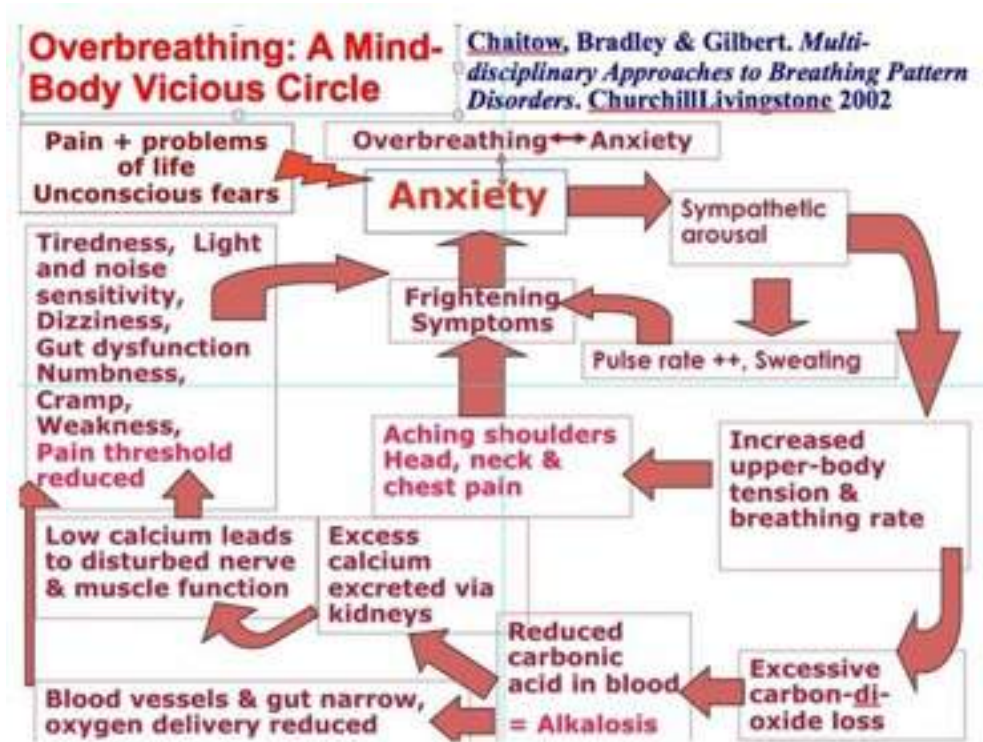
If you need more detailed insight into stretching, tissue release, and dynamic mobility, I have a valuable resource that goes into these specifics in great detail. www.stretchesforsurfers.com

2) BREATHING

This whole breathing thing is pretty relevant. From emotional and stress viewpoints, to effects on cellular physiology, your ability to deal with hold-down situations, the influence breathing can have on muscle tension in the neck and shoulders (who has neck and shoulder issues....???), your breathing is important.

I want to give you the fundamental gist of what's going on here.

From the image above, "Overbreathing: A Mind-Body Vicious Cycle", you can see the potential influence that breathing can have on the body and its systems.



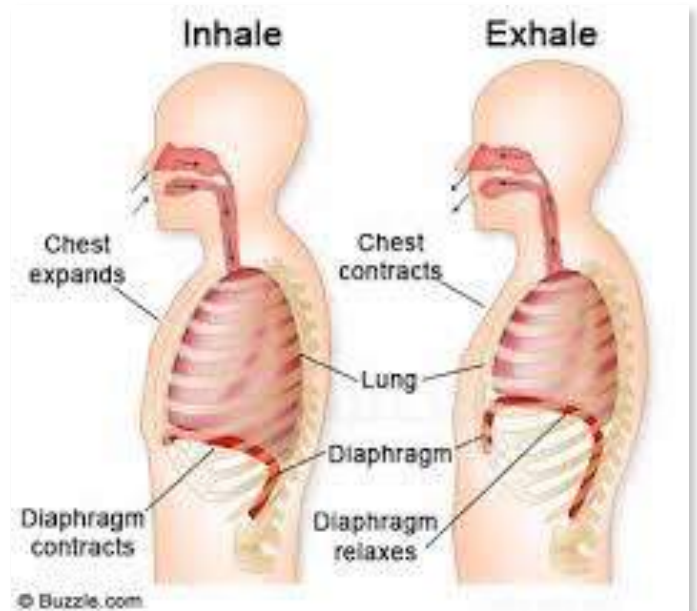
There's a reason that all ancient body, mind, and spirit traditions focus in some form or another on breathing. It's critical to this Life thing we all have going on, and it influences all systems in the body. It's also one of the quickest ways to positively impact your nervous system, your mind, and ultimately your body.

Depending on which teacher, guru, or body practice you follow, they teach specifics of breath differently, but they all generally agree on the fact that the diaphragm needs to be used to drive respiration. Not the neck. Not the shoulders. The diaphragm.

Stop neck breathing.

Lay on your back. Lay one hand on your stomach, and one hand on your chest. Breathe in. Do it a few times. Which hand is doing most of the movement? It's usually the hand on the chest.

Kneel or sit in front of a mirror. Breathe in. Do your shoulders raise up towards your ears? Is your neck doing most of the work?



You probably answered yes to both of those scenarios. It's not necessarily a bad thing, but it's not optimal. You're utilizing what is referred to as an inverted breathing pattern. You're using secondary respiratory muscles (trapezius, scalenes, SCM, levator scapula), to be your primary breath drivers. These muscles tend to not really like this over time.

The goal is to relax these “neck muscles”, and start using the diaphragm as a driver of respiration.

Like our previous topic of Joint Mobility, this Breathing thing goes deep man.... way deep.

The basics are that you need to chill out with your breathing. Literally chill out. Lay on your back, get relaxed, and slow down your breathing. Start shifting that pattern towards more of a “belly breath”.

I don't fully like that term “belly breathing”, because it's neglecting a lot of other important aspects of breathing. Lateral rib expansion, posterior rib expansion, spinal decompression, actual diaphragm use and not simply pushing your belly forwards, these are some of the more detailed aspects of breath work and instruction. Don't worry about them at this point. I only mention them for those that are reading this and realize I'm leaving out deeper, yet highly relevant aspects of breathing.

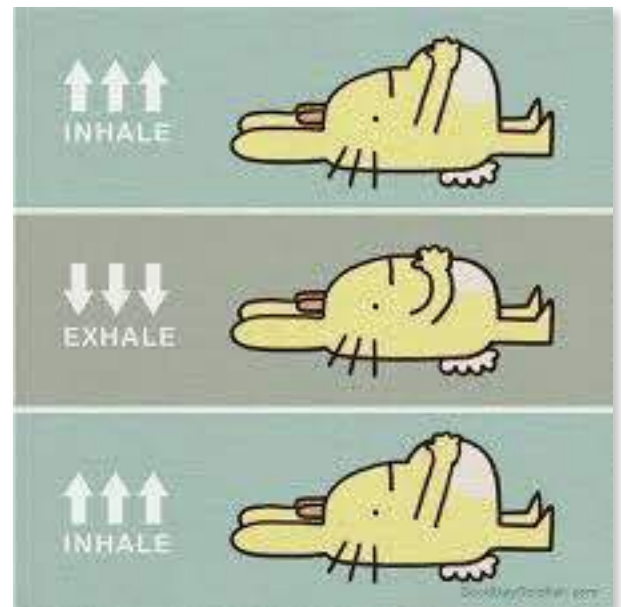
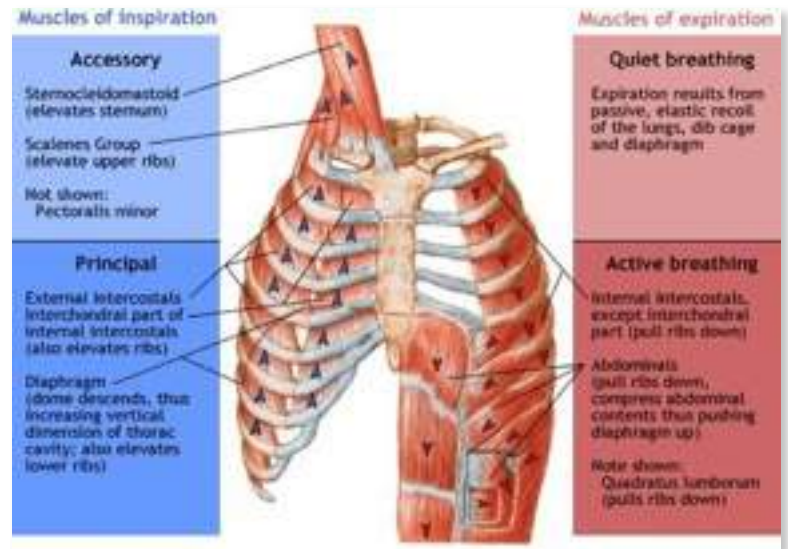
Anyways, this idea of belly breathing usually gets people away from the neck breathing. Inhale, the belly fills, exhale, the belly drops. Relax the neck.

Lay on your back, chill out, several times per week, and mellow out your breathing.

From a meditative and psychologic standpoint this is beneficial. From a cellular respiration standpoint and the influence on O₂ and CO₂ in the cell, this is beneficial. From a stress reduction and shifting towards a more parasympathetic nervous system state, this is beneficial. From a chronic neck and shoulder tension problem this is beneficial. I would hope you're getting the idea here.

Like I said, this breathing thing can go very deep.

At the very least, start taking some time each week, just a few minutes even, and work on more efficient and relaxed breathing.



WHY SHOULD YOU BOTHER WITH THIS BREATHING....

That basic diaphragmatic breathing pattern needs to be in place so in the future you can start working on more performance breathing. Breath hold-down drills, improving recovery after long paddle-outs or training, deeper aspects of meditation, all these require you be able to breathe diaphragmatically in the first place.

DO IT

Several times per week, lay on your back, slow down your thoughts, slow down your breathing, get that neck to relax, and start using that diaphragm. 10-30minutes. Stick with this. Over time, I'd be willing to bet this becomes a really enjoyable and rewarding practice for you.

3) MOVEMENT EFFICIENCY

Be able to move 3-dimensionally, with control, strength, balance, flexibility, and power. Have a large movement repertoire.

Skateboarding, Kettlebell Swings, Slack-Lining, Sprinting, Jumping, Crawling, Jiu Jitus, Medicine Ball Throws, Rock Climbing, Front Squats, Dance, Olympic Ring Chinups, Pushups.....

Fun, strength-development, skill acquisition, movement complexity, that is what the list above offers. It expands your repertoire of movement. It gives you the foundations for strength, control, and awareness in a variable life, and sport (surfing).

I'm a huge supporter of safe, individualized, and progressive Strength & Conditioning work. Some type of organized resistance training.

If you have a negative mindset towards "strength training", lifting weights, or gyms, shift that view towards the positive spectrum. I know, there's a lot of absurdly lame gyms out there, but there's also countless incredible gym spaces, with motivated, passionate, and personal growth minded people. Find that type of environment, train smart, and get stronger. There is simply too much benefit to ignore it. A stronger and more powerful body is not a bad thing. It will help you in life, and in your surfing.





I need to make a strong point. I'm not referring to bodybuilding style of weight training, or what stereotypical opinions may picture. I'm speaking more to movement based training. Compound lifts and larger movement patterns that require integration of the body. Get yourself moving in the relevant movement patterns of the sport, and life.

Training for strength in movement, and complexity, not in isolation like a bicep curl.

I'm a strong advocate of at least 2 resistance training oriented sessions per week. That combined with some yoga, swimming, hiking, surfing, skateboarding, sprinting, playing, quality sleep, good food... that's a really good recipe.

The basics are this: Be able to squat, bend, push, pull, and rotate. Get those basic movement patterns dialed in, and then add resistance, or speed or complexity.

Here's an attempted list of some movements I would like to see people using or working towards, both men and women. Keep in mind how exceptionally limited this list is, these are just a few that immediately come to mind. These exercises have a good movement and strength carryover to life and surfing. And if you're competent with these movements, you have a lot of room for more expanded and dynamic training.

- Front Squats
- Pushups - all variations
- Kettle bell Swings
- Olympic Ring Pullups
- Dynamic Cable Chops
- Bulgarian Split Squats
- Single Leg Deadlifts
- Single Arm Cable Push / Pulls

I'll stop there, but that list could be way longer, and it irritates me how incomplete it is.

Train movement patterns (squat, bend, push, pull, rotate), so that your training has a carryover to your movement in life, and sport (surfing). Start with the basic movement or exercise, get comfortable, then get stronger, develop more movement awareness, and then progress.

(basic movement → strength → speed and complexity)

Learn a basic squat with correct alignment, control, and body position. Get stronger with front squats or goblet squats. Progress to jumping and landing variations, and rotational jumps.

Develop rotational strength and power. Start with a basic Bird Dog or Horse stance, an exercise that focuses on core control. Get stronger with Paloff presses or cable chops. Progress to high speed cable chops or medicine ball throws.

Work on an efficient bend pattern, and learn how to use the hips and back efficiently. Start with Foundation Training or Hip Hinging Patterns. Get stronger with deadlift variations or kettlebell swings. Become more powerful and dynamic with 1arm kettlebell snatches or high speed swing variations.

Pushups....

Lunges....

Pulling....

Repeat that process. Explore. Get more dynamic and expand your movement repertoire.



**Rotation, Squatting, Lunging,
Strength, Power, Flexibility, Flow**

So What Now?

I'm sure you're still left with some questions about training. What should you do? What type of program? What exercises to start with? There's probably some confusion and overwhelm.

I get it.

Seek out professional guidance and insight. Look to my blog or videos, or the countless other blogs from health and fitness professionals. Be wary though, there's a lot of kooks out there in fitness and nutrition land. Don't fall for any BS. Find some good guidance, but start the shift towards quality resistance training. Movement training.

If you're already there with good training, keep expanding, working on your limitations, refining, and discovering new challenges for your body.

And find movement that is fun. This should have been my #1 tip, but you've got to find some training that you enjoy, and incorporate it into your lifestyle.

Do It:

Incorporate some type of resistance training into your lifestyle, minimum 2x's / week. Start with the basics, make sure your joints are pain free, and start learning. You'll get stronger and I guarantee you'll like that, and find it rewarding.

Even the simple use of some olympic rings or a suspension trainer, an exercise ball (swiss ball), and a kettlebell or two, you can explore limitless strength training options at home. You really should do this. Get that equipment if you don't have it, and don't want to go to a gym.

I professionally need to point out that a lot is left unsaid with regards to training in the post you just read. That is the very tippy tip of the iceberg. Go forward with an eagerness to learn, explore, and find good guidance along the way. I coach people on a daily basis with this stuff, and it is always ongoing, dynamic, and new.

4) NUTRITION

Eat better. Eat less processed food. Eat more whole foods. Learn to cook. It's that simple.

There are countless details about this, but you're 75% of the way there if you just focus on eating whole, minimally processed, real foods. You're an adult, so you can likely figure this out. Find a local market to do your shopping, do your best, and don't get lost in the details.

I've said this before, seek insight from a professional. We live in a time of instagram fitness and social media driven information.

Some of it is great, while some of it is exceptionally lacking. Be cautious if dealing with extremes of nutrition, and don't fall into dogma. Real food, most of the time, learn to cook.

If you need further insight into nutrition, get in touch, or refer to any of my blog posts.



5) SURF AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE

Get in the ocean every single chance you get. Our time in this life is short, so do the things that bring you absolute fulfillment and happiness.



This is only scratching the surface of my views on improving performance. I am quite adamant however on the inherent connectedness of health and surfing. If you are a healthier and more robust version of yourself, you'll be able to interact with the world from a more capable standpoint. That's a really good thing.

Start building better habits. Actively seek to improve yourself, learn new things, and give a really good go at this whole life thing we're partaking in.

Improve your Health & Fitness, so that it has a transferable effect on you skills, your life, your hobbies.

If you have any questions, get in touch on social media or email.

-cris mills

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