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Shortlist Your Employer: Acquire Soft Skills to Achieve Your Career and Leadership Success to Excel as a CEO

— M.S. RAO —

Abstract

This unconventional paper lays emphasis on soft and hard skills to shortlist your employer. It shares seven timeless tools to fast-track your career and seven time-tested steps to achieve your all-round success; explains career capital and outlines tips to build your career capital; differentiates between soft and hard skills with a plethora of examples and illustrations; and distinguishes between Indian and Chinese CEOs. It suggests that strong support from the C-suite leaders is essential to build career capital to keep leadership talent ready in the pipeline. It enlightens that there is no permanent employment, but only permanent employability. Lastly, it calls for equipping with soft skills to enhance your employability to grow as a CEO.

“The biggest mistake that you can make is to believe that you are working for somebody else. Job security is gone. The driving force of a career must come from the individual. Remember: Jobs are owned by the company; you own your career!”
— Earl Nightingale

Introduction

Conventionally, employers shortlist job aspirants to fill their vacancies. However, this unconventional article underscores how to shortlist your employer. If you are meritorious and equipped with employability skills, you can shortlist your employer. If you are equipped with hard and soft skills, you can shortlist your employer. If you acquire right mindset, skill set, and tool set, you can shortlist your employer. If you are equipped with self-management skills, job-related skills, and transferable skills, you can shortlist your employer. Hence, shortlisting your employer is an easy task if you are equipped with adequate knowledge, skills, and abilities, and are employable and deployable in the corporate world.

I have an experience of shortlisting my employers during my lifetime as I have been choosy in pursuing my passionate areas. Similarly, you must shortlist your employer based on your passion to fast-track your career to grow as a CEO. There is a myth among some job aspirants that employees are only in the dire need of searching for employers. The truth is that employers are more concerned to recruit the right talent to achieve organizational excellence and effectiveness. In fact, job seekers and job givers must be in a win-win position to make employment fruitful and meaningful. Above all, these are the days of

partnership between the job providers and the job seekers as the days of the employer and the employee relationship are becoming obsolete.

How to Shortlist Your Employer: You must choose the right employer based on your passions, career opportunities, and monetary benefits. You must be clear about your career goals and objectives. You must have clarity about your career goals for 5, 10, 15, and 20 years. Emphasize your passions more than any quest for money. If you follow your passions, money will follow you naturally. Additionally, choosing and shortlisting the right employer helps you balance your personal, professional, and social life to provide meaning to your life.

Love Your Employability, not Your Employer: Some of the employees in private organizations love their employers to safeguard their employments. They flatter their employers and pass on the information of their colleagues to their employers to be in their favor. They think that it is a way of demonstrating employee loyalty to their organizations. In fact, what they must understand is that they must love their employability rather than loving their employers.

Employers appreciate employees who are committed and dedicated. They don't appreciate flatterers and informers. Of course, they need informers in employees who can pass them genuine information about other employees to safeguard their organizational interests. It is known as informal communication which often serves as a feedback for the employers.

In the present context, employers are very serious and they respect the employees who deliver their goods properly. They appreciate the employees who add value to their organizations. The true employees work sincerely and deliver their goods as per the expectations of their employers. It adds value to their résumés and enhances their employability. To ensure your permanent employability, you must regularly update your knowledge, skills, and abilities. This approach enhances your employability. It earns respect from your employer and safeguards your employment as well. Even if there is any problem with your present employer due to organizational politics, you will be in great demand elsewhere as you are already equipped with employability skills.

Adopt Seven Steps to Achieve Success in Your Life

People often ask me how I have achieved my success in most of my training and teaching programs. The high achievers respond about their passion, hard work, and employment accomplishments. But I respond to my audiences differently with my time-tested, seven-step success process as follows:

1. I always discover my innate strengths. I am rarely concerned about my weaknesses. At the same time, I safeguard from my weaknesses. Additionally, I learn lessons from my mistakes.
2. I don't compare myself with others because I am born with unique gifts and traits which no other person has in this world. As a result, I don't envy others. Most conflicts in this world arise due to envy. When there is no envy, your mind is peaceful and you concentrate on your progress.
3. I always concentrate on my core strengths and create work. Hence, I enjoy doing what I do, and it gives me a lot of confidence and immense satisfaction.
4. I look for opportunities that match my work. I am fortunate to be blessed with an imaginative mind and I constantly explore opportunities within my mind. Above all, I

have an open mind. If I don't find opportunities, I still explore various options freshly, and finally I find some and shortlist a few of them.

5. I align my work with the identified opportunities. I never look at the door that is closed. I always look at the door that is open. I strongly believe in Winston Churchill's quote: "The pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity. The optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty."
6. I have a database with a substantial network of international connections with whom I regularly communicate via e-mails and phone. I help them and seek their help, if needed.
7. Whenever I endeavor to align my work with the identified opportunities, I find lots of distractions. Most times, things don't go as per my plan. Hence, I analyze the reasons for distractions and address them earnestly with a calm and reflective mind. Again, I try to align my created work with the available opportunities. I fail repeatedly, but I learn lessons and persist. Because of this persistence, I align my work with the available opportunities and ultimately achieve success. In this process, I emphasize "time" and "timing" which pave the way for my ultimate success.

Equip with Seven Timeless Tools to Fast-Track Your Career

Once I was invited to inspire engineering students who were selected by a prestigious Information Technology company in India. I shared with them some corporate challenges and enlightened them the following timeless tools to fast-track their career:

1. **You have only permanent employability, not permanent employment:** As long as you learn continuously to update yourself, you will have employability. The day you stop learning, you lose your employability and employment as well. Hence, strive hard to acquire knowledge, skills, and abilities regularly to excel in your career consistently and constantly.
2. **Who wins at the end of the race counts, not who leads at the beginning of the race:** There are leaders who tasted early success in life and ultimately hit lows in their lives. Early success often breeds excessive ego. They take success for granted, leading to ultimate failures and downfalls. Hence, make sure that you continue leading in the race of life by learning lessons from time to time to sustain your success.
3. **You will come across three kinds of individuals in your life:** The below-average individuals often talk about individuals. The average individuals often talk about issues. The above-average individuals often talk about ideas. Hence, associate with above-average individuals who will be part of solutions rather than problems. Additionally, it helps you join elite achievers to achieve great success in your life.
4. **You are hired because of your hard skills and fired due to dearth of soft skills:** Most people have hard skills which are also known as technical skills and domain competence. But they fail to express them properly due to dearth of soft skills. Soft skills are all about how you convey your hard skills. They help you fast-track your career.
5. **Help locate the fish:** The conventional wisdom talks about teaching the art of catching fish rather than giving fish. The current world is highly complex and competitive. It is essential for leaders to show opportunities to others as presently people are already aware of the art of catching fish. Hence, guide, groom, and show opportunities to others.

6. **Persistence pays:** It is always the average people with extraordinary persistence who succeed in this world. When you look at Thomas Alva Edison, Colonel Sanders, and Alexander Graham Bell, they all succeeded due to their persistence. They persisted when there seemed to be no light at the end of the tunnel. John C. Maxwell once remarked, “When water boils at 212 degrees, but at 211 degrees, it is still just hot water. One extra degree, an increase of less than one-half of one percent, can make the difference between a pot of languishing liquid and a bubbling caldron of power. One degree can create a full head of steam – enough power to move a train weighing tons. That one degree is usually momentum.” Therefore, don’t give up when you are close to victory. Take your battle to its logical end. Don’t get carried away by failures. Continue your work with optimism relentlessly and consistently to accomplish your goals.
7. **What got you here won’t get you there:** This message comes from Marshall Goldsmith who is a globally-renowned CEO coach. The tools and techniques that helped you come up to this level will not help you reach your next higher level. You must change your methods and style of approaches from time to time. Don’t get complacent with your achievements. You must reinvent from time to time to become updated to excel in your life.

Ensure Your Employability with Soft Skills and Employment with Hard Skills

Soft skills are different from hard skills. It is a new discipline catching up globally as companies realize its importance to improve interpersonal relations to enhance bottom lines. The term “soft skills” has been referred to by different names in the past, and are often mistaken for emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills, communication skills, and behavioral skills. In fact, soft skills are all about your personality, attitude, and behavior. Soft skills are the way you communicate matters in a positive, polite, pleasing, and polished manner. They are different from hard skills which are nothing but technical skills and your domain competence. Hard skills are mostly tangible and can be seen while soft skills are largely intangible and can be felt. Hard skills are technical skills and are mostly phrased using nouns while soft skills are people skills and are mostly phrased using verbs. A judicious blend of both soft and hard skills is essential to fast-tracking your career.

Soft versus hard skills with illustrations: Here is the difference between soft and hard skills with examples and illustrations. If you call one, “physically handicapped,” that is known as a hard skill. Instead, if you say, “physically challenged,” that is known as a soft skill. If you instruct a smoker, “don’t smoke,” that is known as a hard skill. Instead, if you communicate “thanks for not smoking,” that is known as a soft skill. If you make reference to the “generation gap,” that is known as a hard skill. In contrast, if you say “generational differences,” that is known as a soft skill. If you call people, “slow learners,” that is known as a hard skill. In contrast, if you call it “differently-abled learners,” that is known as a soft skill. If you refer to certain situations as “problems,” that is known as a hard skill, whereas if you call them “challenges,” then it is known as a soft skill. If you refer to deficits as “weaknesses,” it is known as a hard skill, but if you call them “concerns,” it is known as a soft skill. Succinctly, soft skills emphasize *how* you communicate while hard skills emphasize *what* you communicate.

According to Anthony Robbins, there is a famous story told about Tom Watson, the founder of IBM. One of his subordinates had made a terrible mistake that had cost the company ten million dollars. He was called into Watson's office and said, "I suppose you want my resignation." Watson looked at him and said, "Are you kidding? We just spent ten million dollars educating you." It is obvious that Tom Watson emphasized the importance of costly corporate education with the usage of soft skills. Similarly, one of the technicians in the Indian Air Force made a terrible mistake, resulting in the crash of military aircraft that had cost hugely. Fortunately, the pilot ejected out safely with his parachute. The technician was called into the commander's office and the commander looked at the technician and said, "Indian Air Force invested huge money to train you in aircrafts. Remember, military education is very costly." Hence, you can understand the significance of soft skills in expressing hard skills in a positive, polite, pleasing, and polished manner to bring out the behavioural changes in others.

It is easy to measure hard skills while it is hard to measure soft skills. It is easy to teach hard skills while it is hard to teach soft skills. Usually, teachers teach hard skills while trainers train soft skills. Since soft skills are behavioral skills, it requires extra efforts on the part of trainers to use various tools and techniques including interaction, role-plays, active participation, and experiential learning to bring out the desired behavioral changes in the participants.

Significance of soft skills: Remember, words are magical. If you know how to articulate them effectively, politely, and pleasingly, you can get your tasks executed effectively. You can come out with flying colors irrespective of the industry and sector to which you belong. You can avoid ill-will among the people. With soft skills, you can easily manage organizational politics and present things in a positive perspective by changing your behavior as per the situation. You can develop emotional intelligence quotients and assertiveness which are ingredients of soft skills. You can get along well and effectively with your superiors, peers, and subordinates in the workplace. You can get along with various personalities at the workplace. You can manage conflicts effectively. You can be in the favor of others with your corporate etiquette. You can not only ensure corporate survival, but also fast-track your career. Finally, you can achieve your productivity and performance. With hard skills, you can manage your boss; and with soft skills, you can lead your boss.

Integrate hard and soft skills: You can present your hard skills in your résumé while you can demonstrate your soft skills during your employment interview. Employees need three skills – job-related skills, transferable skills, and self-management skills to grow in their career. Hard skills can be compared with job-related skills while soft skills with transferable skills. These soft skills are transferable skills that are useful irrespective of the industry and sector you enter. You may not need your hard skills over a period of time, but you certainly need soft skills throughout your career. In fact, you need them more as you reach senior positions.

If you are an actor, your acting comes under your hard skills and how to meet and interact with others in the film industry falls in the category of soft skills. For instance, if actors are good at acting which is known as hard skills, but fail to interact and associate with others in the film industry, this is known as soft skills. If they don't demonstrate soft skills, they fail miserably in the film industry. Similarly, if actors are good at interacting and associating with

others but lack in the acting skills, they fail miserably. Hence, there is need for a judicious and proportional mix of hard and soft skills to achieve your professional success.

Build Your Career Capital

Henry Ford once remarked, “If money is your hope for independence you will never have it. The only real security that a man will have in this world is a reserve of knowledge, experience, and ability.” Career capital is the ability to build your career consistently to be marketable in the job market in the current global context. The days of permanent employment are gone. These are the days of permanent employability to enhance your professional success. Hence, it is essential for employees to build their career capital cumulatively by learning from various sources such as training and development, practical exposure, and pursuing courses.

Career capital is the true capital. It is a soft asset to employees paving the way for hard capital. Employees with career capital are constantly on the lookout for opportunities. They have strong business acumen and build high internal locus of control. Additionally, they are in an advantageous position as employers cannot fire them. They are confident of taking more risks to achieve great career success.

Career capital and Gen Y: Presently Gen Y is highly ambitious and they appreciate preferring career to job — and career to money. They are willing to postpone their marriages and are ready to sacrifice their personal lives to build their career capital. They strongly believe that if their career capital is strong, the rest of the things will fall in line. They crave coaches and mentors who can train and groom them into leadership roles and responsibilities. They appreciate continuous learning and constant feedback. They job hop as they don't want routine. They want something different.

Tips to Build Your Career Capital:

- Be specialized in your area of passion. Continuously work hard in it for 10,000 hours to excel as a professional. Malcolm Gladwell emphasized that the key to high levels of success in any field is practicing a specific task for a total of about 10,000 hours.
- Do research in your area of interest regularly to stay ahead of your time. Blog to share your knowledge. Write articles and research papers and get them published in prestigious publications.
- Acquire new skills and abilities regularly. Share your knowledge and network with others to get to know the latest developments.
- Showcase your skills and abilities regularly. Participate in conferences, meetings, and trade meetings to interact with the professionals from your domain.
- Come out of your comfort zone to explore new areas in depth. Acquire breadth of knowledge in diversified areas and depth of knowledge in your core area to build your career capital as well as your brand.
- Develop the attitude as a “consultant,” rather than as a “contractor.” The knowledge workers fall in the category of consultants while the manual workers fall in the category of contractors. The champions of career capital treat it as a true currency rather than the conventional monetary currency.

Career capital is a unique blend of soft and hard skills and soft and hard acumen. This capital helps you fast-track your career and catapult you to senior leadership positions

including CEO. Hence, build your career capital brick by brick clearly, cautiously, and consistently to shortlist your employer and to succeed as a leader.

Adapt to Succeed as a CEO

Leadership is often taken granted by leaders. They often forget the fact that they cannot take their followers and partners for granted. It is basically because leadership is highly dynamic, and it changes from time to time and from situation to situation. What worked in a particular situation might not work in another situation. What worked for a leader in a particular situation might not work in another situation for the same leader. That is the reason why we have so many leadership styles. Some leaders rise high and fall flatly on the ground subsequently. Why it happens is that neither the leadership nor the leaders are static. As people change, their expectations and aspirations also change. Presently people are highly ambitious and expect a lot from all stakeholders which has become a challenging task for leaders.

When we take the example of Winston Churchill, he proved himself as a war-time hero. He led the UK and other allied forces to victory during the Second World War when the world demanded his services. He was a great hope to the world when the world was about to be overtaken by Nazi Germany and other Axis forces. Churchill was persistent and hopeful about the victory. He inspired, showed the direction, led from the front, and achieved victory. Unfortunately, the same Churchill failed to win at home during peace time. It is obvious that expectations and aspirations of the people change, and hence the leadership changes. At the same time, leaders must also change with the prevailing ground realities and adapt quickly to reinvent themselves.

Warren Bennis unveiled that adaptability is essential for leadership effectiveness and success. Leaders must change quickly to adapt to new contexts to stay relevant to ensure longevity. The leaders and CEOs must take time off from their busy schedules to undergo executive coaching to change their behavior to improve organizational bottom lines. One behavioral change in a CEO can bring out drastic improvement in the organizational bottom lines. Hence, leaders and CEOs must undergo executive coaching to stay relevant and successful.

Executive Coaching for CEOs

Most chief executives lead from the front based on their past experiences, observation, and learning. But rarely do they avail themselves of opportunities to learn from executive coaches who are specialists in executive coaching. They don't realize their blind spots but lead their organizations just because they were successful in the past and were appointed as chief executives. Does it work for them? Does it enhance their leadership effectiveness?

Globally, the business climate is changing rapidly and the chief executives are busy with corporate firefighting. If they are made aware of their blind spots, they can enhance their leadership effectiveness. But who will enlighten them? It is the executive coaches who can play a crucial role to bring out the desired behavioral improvement in chief executives.

Apart from the retirement of CEOs who are mostly baby-boomers, there is a decreased rate of longevity of chief executives globally which is a cause for concern. According to the

Harvard Business Review,¹ 2 out of 5 new CEOs fail in their first 18 months on the job. Hence, there is an urgent need to keep fresh talent ready through executive coaching in the senior leadership position to avoid any kind of organizational eventuality.

Indian Versus Chinese CEOs

When Satya Nadella became the CEO of Microsoft, the global media started to eulogize Indian CEOs, and a number of articles have featured in prestigious international magazines and newspapers to analyze the reasons for Indians excelling as CEOs in America and other European countries. Indian media was especially over the moon over Satya's international elevation.

Research shows that BRIC countries will be wealthier than many current major economies by 2039. Presently both China and India have the second and the fourth largest economies (GDP-PPP), respectively. International media compared Indian CEOs with Chinese CEOs as China is also emerging as a global economic super power which is strong in many ways. It is a well-admitted fact that Indian CEOs excel better than Chinese CEOs in America and other European countries. Both Indian and Chinese CEOs are hard-working and ambitious. Indians have a larger number of knowledge workers than the Chinese. Indians are strong in the services sectors, especially IT and ITes, while Chinese are strong in infrastructure and manufacturing. For the Chinese, there are opportunities available at home with exciting pay and perks. Hence, the Chinese talent doesn't consider migrating much to America whereas the Indian talent migrates to America as there are fewer opportunities at home. Additionally, Indians encounter several challenges at home such as inadequate infrastructure, inferior workforce, bureaucratic bottlenecks, corruption, and politicization. Here are some of the advantages Indians have an edge over their Chinese counterparts:

- Indians adapt quickly to the environment. The Dean of Leadership, Warren Bennis, once remarked that adaptability is the key factor for leadership effectiveness and success. Additionally, Charles Darwin quoted, "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change." Since Indians are strong in adaptability, they excel in an alien land.
- Indians have familiarity with the English language. In fact, India has the largest English-speaking population in the world. Hence, they have the ability to articulate effectively in the English language.
- Indians network effectively, thanks again to familiarity with the English language!
- Some of the Indian CEOs were educated in prestigious business schools in America which helped them find acceptance easily and have a firm foothold.
- Indians are workaholics by nature and are risk-takers. They have the ability to explore the opportunities and avail themselves accordingly.
- Indians are resourceful as they have the ability to work with what they have. They develop this attitude in India which helps in America where people often fail to work despite being inundated with resources. Indians are aware of the cliché: *it is the bad tradesman who blames his tools*.

¹ <http://hbr.org/2005/02/ending-the-ceo-succession-crisis/ar/1>.

- Indians are familiar with the Western culture. They adopt to the Western culture partly in India. It equips them with the cultural intelligence to create cultural chemistry and compatibility with America and other western countries.
- Indian society is highly diverse with an emphasis on “unity in diversity.” It promotes tolerance towards others’ cultures, languages, religions, and regions which help them gel well with other cultures easily.
- Indians come out of their comfort zones once they depart India. For instance, there were eminent Indians including Hargobind Khurana, Subrahmanyam Chandrasekhar, and Venkatraman Ramakrishnan to name a few who became successful after they left India. The fact is that when they leave India, they come out of their comfort zones and grow quickly.
- Indians basically thrive on challenges and risk when they live in India. It is an added advantage to grow globally when they go overseas.
- Indians have an open mind with an ability to identify and explore opportunities. Americans respect talent and knowledge and they appreciate Indians’ workaholic mindsets and professionalism. Above all, both India and America are democratic countries with an open economy which connects them quickly.

All these aspects matter a lot for Indians to grow globally. If you look at the number of management thinkers in Thinkers50, it is obvious that Indians have an appetite for management. Several Indians are seen among Thinkers50, including Vijay Govindarajan, Pankaj Ghemawat, Nirmalya Kumar, C. K. Prahlad, Ram Charan, Nitin Nohria, Subir Chowdhury, Anil Gupta, and Rakesh Khurana. There is a growing appetite among Indian management thinkers to excel as global management gurus through their research and contributions. Most top business schools in the world have faculty members from Indian origin as it shows the strength of Indians and their acceptance globally in the area of management. There is a substantial demand for Indian management faculty members globally with a blend of industry, research, teaching, training, and consultancy background. We find Indians leading in top positions globally in all spheres.

They are breaking their traditional barriers to touch the sky. Likewise, there are a number of differences between Indians and Chinese that make a significant difference in Indians excelling as CEOs in America and other western countries. Above all, it is essential to have talent and drive to excel as CEOs that Indians are equipped with enormously.

To summarize, acquire the right mindset, tool set, and skill set and blend your soft and hard skills to shortlist your employer to fast-track your career to grow as a CEO. To conclude, in the words of Jack Welch: “You can give lifetime employability by training people, by making them adaptable, making them mobile to go other places to do other things. But you can’t guarantee lifetime employment.”

Ethical Call to Address Climate Change

The 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will take place in Paris in December 2015 to address climate change on a global basis. Hence, I take it as an opportunity to share a few thoughts on this topic. Containing climate change is a major challenge for countries globally. This challenge arose due to the ignorance and negligence of people. It requires a holistic approach from all stakeholders including government, people, and global bodies to decrease global warming.

Governments alone cannot address climate change. People must be educated about the challenges involved in climate change. They must be taught about the techniques to reduce carbon. Here are some ways to address this challenge:

- Be energy efficient.
- Choose renewable power.
- Reduce waste.
- Prefer vegetarian food.
- Minimize the usage of automobiles (use a bicycle, if possible, to ensure good health).
- Eat organic food.
- Remember the slogan “let polluters pay.”
- Bring awareness of this challenge to the people.

Secretary of State John Kerry rightly remarked, “Global climate challenge is about opportunity, security, even our very survival in the long term.”

To conclude, keep people, planet, and profit as the criteria to ensure ecology.

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“Where Knowledge is Wealth” – URL: <http://profmsr.blogspot.com> – was named among the “Best

21st Century Leadership Blogs.” His award-winning book, *Smart Leadership: Lessons for Leaders* – URL: <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00D9S8SCW> was published as a Spanish language e-book. His vision is to build one million students as global leaders by 2030 – URL: http://professormsraovision2030.blogspot.in/2014/12/professor-m-s-raos-vision-2030-one_31.html. His vision program was ranked as one of the Top 10 Finalists in the “Not for Profit” category of Leadership 500 Excellence Awards 2015. He has been honored as an upcoming International Leadership Guru by Leadership Gurus International — URL: <http://www.globalgurus.org/leadership/upcoming.php> and listed as one of the leading achievers around the world in Marquis Who's Who in the World in 2013. He serves as an Advisor and Judge for several prestigious international organizations including the Global Leadership Awards in Malaysia and the Small Business Book Awards in the United States. He received International Award - International Coach of the Year 2013 from prestigious “Comprehensive Coaching U, Inc.” USA – URL <http://www.coachinstitute.com/CoachoftheYear/winners.html>. He coined an innovative teaching tool – *Meka's Method*; leadership training tool – 11E Leadership Grid; and leadership learning tool – Soft Leadership Grid, based on his new leadership style, “Soft Leadership” which is the most frequently downloaded research paper in ICT, Emerald, UK <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/journals.htm?articleid=17087126>. He successfully led a webinar on soft leadership organized by the International Leadership Association – URL: <http://www.ila-net.org/Webinars/Archive/Rao082012.html>. His Amazon book – URL: <http://www.amazon.com/M.-S.-Rao/e/B00MB63BKM>. Most of his work is available free of charge in his four blogs: <http://professormsraovision2030.blogspot.in>, <http://profmsr.blogspot.com>, <http://professormsrao.blogspot.com> and <http://professormsraoguru.blogspot.com>.

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