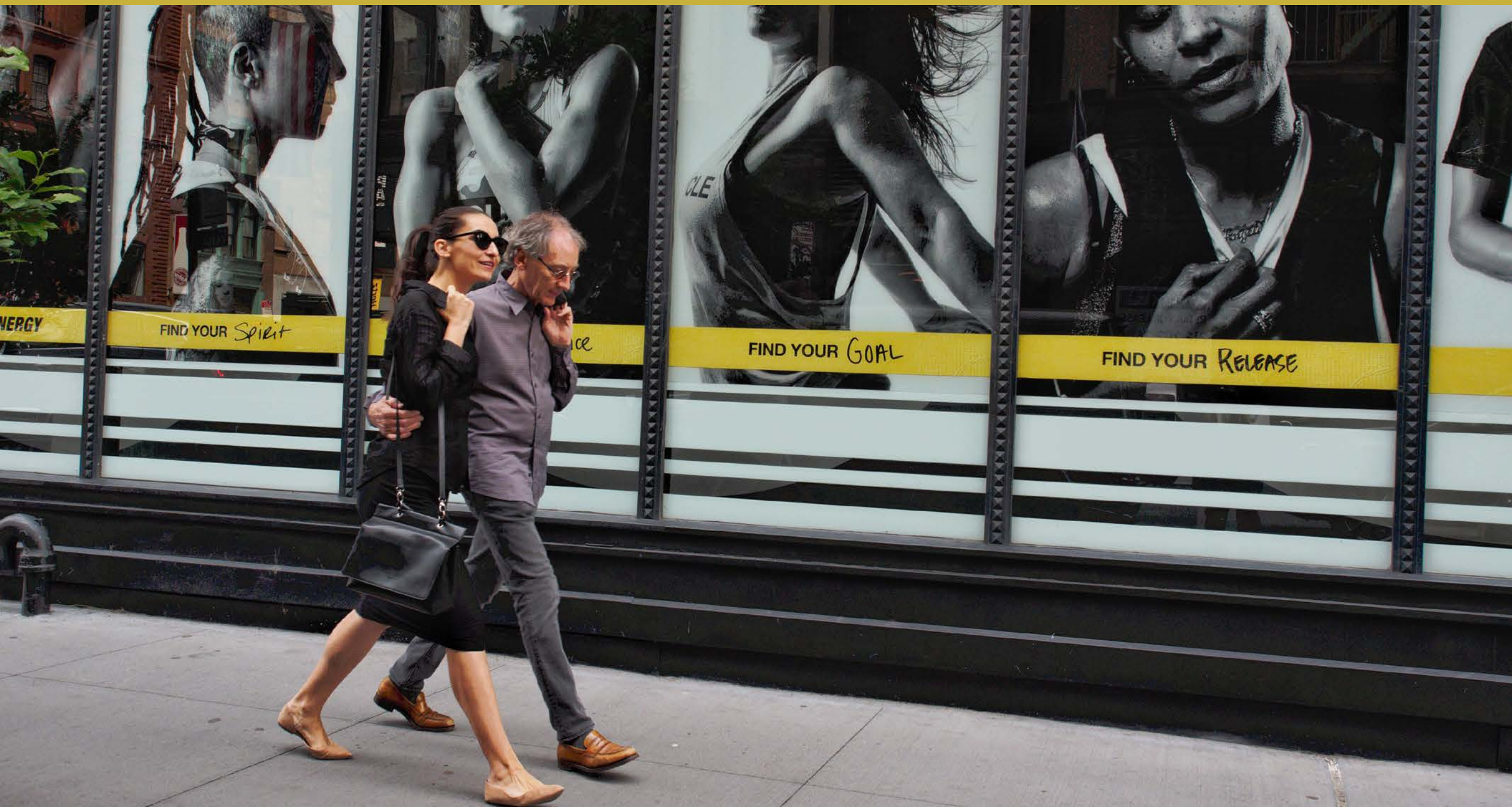


# INSTAGRAM FOR NON-MILLENNIALS

Quick Guide  
Written by Diane Wehr



For many photographers, the question of what to do with pictures after you have taken them is a formidable issue. We take thousands of pictures and then what? My personal solution was essentially to do nothing, because that was the easiest path.

Fortunately, my millennial+ children kept encouraging me to share my photos on social media, and specifically on Instagram. It is the logical place to post photos because it is a photo-sharing app.

Certainly, there are other photo-sharing communities. Flickr is one that comes to mind. An essential difference between Flickr and Instagram is that on Flickr, photographers share their work with other photographers.

On Instagram, photographers share their work with people interested in looking at photos. I eventually opened an Instagram account, and my life as a photographer has not been the same since.

This guide on how to build an Instagram account is not meant to teach millennials – they figured out how to accomplish that years ago.

It is not meant to teach people who plan to use Instagram to post family pictures – their Instagram audience will develop naturally.

It can be a starter article for professional photographers, but they have different requirements and will have to eventually pursue different strategies than the hobbyist photographer.

This guide is for the photographer who has made the decision, and mustered up the courage, to put their work out for the world to see.

You would think that with 500,000,000 active users on Instagram, surely someone would notice your photos from the very first day you start posting. However, you are competing with the other 95,000,000 photos posted each day. It takes time and effort to develop your Instagram niche. This guide explains how to do it. You will learn the following:

1. What to expect when you post your first photo
2. How to get more likes
3. How to get more comments
4. How to get more followers
5. How to get to be a top post

**⚠ Note:** If you'd like to improve your composition skills for better Instagram images, grab a copy of Photzy's best-selling premium guide, [Advanced Composition](#).





Photograph by Diane Wehr

## YOU WANT PEOPLE TO SEE YOUR PICTURES

Seven months after I opened my Instagram account, I first used a well-chosen list of hashtags.

The number of likes on this particular post increased by about 50% that day. I have to believe it was because more people saw it.

When you post a picture, it can go to a variety of feeds.

It will definitely go to the feeds of your followers; although, whether it is high in their feed is controlled by an algorithm, so they may, or may not, see it.

It will also go to the feed of any hashtag that you assign to the post.

There is a whole theory about how to choose hashtags that will give you the “most bang for your buck.” That issue will be taken up later in this guide.

Your post can also possibly go to the

“Search” feed of some members.

For example, if you post a #streetphoto, it is conceivable that it will be an Instagram recommended photo for me to see in my search feed, because I post street photos.

You will also be identified as a new member on Instagram to some members whose interest in photography matches the kind of photo you have posted.

When I posted my first, really terrible photo on Instagram, I had no followers, and I attached only one hashtag.

I got two likes, which now strikes me as a miracle.

I have no idea how those people found me. I suspect they saw that I was new to Instagram.

Liking and following new members is a strategy to build a large group of followers, because a new member will likely follow back.

Two people liked my picture and followed me. I followed back. One became an Instagram friend and one did not.

I learned my first lesson that some, actually many, people do not want a mutual Instagram relationship. They simply want more followers. Even if you follow them, they will un-follow you a short time later.

That is my least favorite part of Instagram.

When you start your Instagram account, poll family and friends to see if they are using Instagram. Post a picture (choose a good one, trust me) and attach some hashtags.

Then go to the search function and search for people whom you know who are on Instagram. Follow them, and hopefully they will follow you back.

You will likely get a couple of likes and follows from people you do not know. Now, all you have to do is build on that!



Photograph by Diane Wehr

## YOU WANT PEOPLE TO LIKE YOUR PICTURES

After two years of working to build my Instagram account, this picture, with 254 likes, is my most liked photo yet.

That is not a lot, but I remember hoping to get 10 likes during the first couple of months. It took forever to get 100 likes on a photo, but now my photos usually acquire that many likes during the first 6 to 10 hours after it is posted.

There are many reasons that people will like an Instagram post.

It may be out of loyalty, because they are a member of your family or your friend. It may be loyalty that you have encouraged, because you have been loyal to them. Likes beget likes.

Once you have followers, their posts will show up on your feed. Be generous with your likes.



My policy is to like every one of the posts that I see on my feed with a few exceptions.

For example, I do not generally “like” casually taken photos of people on the margins of society.

In addition, I will comment on a good many posts. That extra bit of effort goes a long way to building loyalty, because it helps to build a relationship.

People also like posts because of shared interests.

This is where hashtags come in. A hashtag is a pointer to collections of pictures that are grouped because they share the hashtag.

When you click on the hashtag, you are sent to the collection. The first nine pictures are the current “trending” top posts.

Those trending top posts are selected by algorithms, which are the big Instagram mystery.

Below the top posts are the pictures that have been posted, in chronological order, to that collection.

I use Olympus hashtags, like #getolympus and #omd, whenever I post a picture taken with my Olympus camera.

Other Olympus users who see my posts in an Olympus hashtag collection will potentially find them interesting just because we use the same brand of camera.

You are allowed to post up to 30 hashtags per picture. If you attempt to post more than 30, none are posted.

I keep lists in the Notes app on my iPad with names like Olympus B&W, Olympus Color, Canon B&W, Canon Color, and iPhone.

Each list contains exactly 26 hashtags that are appropriate for the camera and the type of picture being posted (i.e. black & white or color).

I post all my pictures from my iPad because you cannot post from a computer.

As part of the posting process, I copy the appropriate list of hashtags, add a hashtag that indicates where the picture was taken, and then maybe one or two more hashtags specific to the picture.

Five of the hashtags are camera specific, and the rest are travel and street photography hashtags because that is the kind of photos I post.

Many of the hashtags that I use came from a wonderful member of the community who direct messaged me that my photos deserved a wider audience.

He sent me a list of recommended hashtags.

That kind of support is my favorite part of Instagram.

You can find hashtags by using the Search function. Another way is to study the hashtags on someone else's pictures. There is a strategy to choosing which ones you will use.

The collection '#olympus' has more than 3,000,000 posts. The collection '#omdem1' has less than 75,000 posts.

As a new Instagrammer, small is better than large because you want and need your picture to stay in the most recent posting position for as long as possible, and you want a shot at being a top post. My recommendation is to initially choose hashtags with a range of a few thousand posts, or less, to no more than 500,000 posts.

You can upgrade your hashtags as your account grows.

The Instagram community expects me to post street photography, and more than that, they expect me to post black & white street photography.

That is because I have chosen black & white street photography as my 'brand' on Instagram. When I do post color, I can expect to have fewer likes.



Photograph by Diane Wehr

This image was my first color post to break 200 likes. Some street photographers brand very specifically. They have two Instagram accounts: one for black & white and one for color.

People like posts when their expectations are met.

To help set expectations, it is generally recommended to limit the kinds of pictures you post. This is branding.

I post street photography almost exclusively, which means I don't post that prize landscape photo that I would really like to share.

Some people combine landscape and nature, or architecture and landscape – the possibilities are endless.

There are other ways to brand.



Instagram offers filters, which are specific kinds of post-processing. Using a particular filter on all photos is a unifying brand for a gallery.

Some people choose aspect ratio, like only posting square pictures, as a unifier.

You also set expectations by the frequency with which you post. I post one picture every day.

That is the recommended maximum; otherwise, you might wear out your welcome with viewers.

Some people post once every three days. Since I only get new followers with new posts, every three days is not enough to meet my personal growth goals.

Perhaps you remember my observation that joining Instagram changed my life as a photographer?

I now have to come up with 365 pictures a year – the best pictures I can take – in order to post every day. I had to stop being a lazy photographer and get out and shoot.

Choose a frequency that makes sense with your archived photo bank and your likelihood to take new pictures.

Instagram is intended to be real-time posting, so the likelihood of taking pictures is more important than the number of pictures archived in your choice of frequency.

Whatever frequency you choose, stick with it.

- To increase the likes on your posts, do your part in the community by liking other people's posts.
- Thoughtfully choose hashtags and methodically use them – no skipping around.
- Be dependable in the type and frequency of your posts.

**⚠ Note:** If you'd like to improve your composition skills for better Instagram images, grab a copy of Photzy's best-selling premium guide, [Advanced Composition](#).



Photograph by Diane Wehr

## YOU WANT PEOPLE TO COMMENT ON YOUR PICTURE

This photo, which included the caption, "It is so easy to stereotype," generated 95 comments.

Half of the comments were my replies, but it was still the most comments that I have ever gotten.



We talked about stereotypes, signs, timing on shots, and how nice it is that Instagram allows artists and photographers to come together. It was a good, good day for me.

If getting a like to your post feels good, getting a comment feels great.

To some extent, what you give is what you get. Try to be generous in commenting, and try to be genuine. My comment style is to mention something interesting in the picture or good about the picture and then add a "signature emoji" (a small, cartoonish icon).

I often use a clapping hand, or a camera and a clapping hand, to signal "good photo" to finish my comment.

If the color blue is the interesting aspect of the photo, I will use a blue heart instead of the camera emoji.

If you want to get more comments, you have to give lots of quality comments.



Photograph by Chris van der Colff

## YOU WANT PEOPLE TO FOLLOW YOUR FEED

Instagram member @christoph\_65 has a wonderful feed that is remarkable because, even though it includes a wide range of photography genres, he has more than 2,000 followers. He adds value with an interesting discussion of each picture. He also posts close to real time because he is constantly out shooting.

You need followers because, if more people follow you, then your pictures are posted on more feeds, which potentially results in more likes. I can promise you, you will have a surprising number of people follow you.



The problem is that many of them simply want you to be a part of the body count of their followers, and as soon as you follow them, they will unfollow you.

There will be days when you actually lose ground on your number of followers.

For the most part, I am looking for a mutual relationship with followers, and so I want my Follower and Following list to be approximately the same.

There are mobile apps that track Instagram data, including data on people who unfollow you. I use the app, "Followers." The app makes it easy to know who has stopped following you and also makes it easy to stop following them.

I also follow some sites that are hashtag hubs. One example is Lensculture. They do not follow you back, but you have a chance of having a post selected by them to be featured on their hub, which results in important exposure.

Building a stable and "healthy" group of followers is essential if you truly want to widely share your work.

My recommendation for doing this is to follow the people who follow you and look for other likely candidates to follow. You get the most benefit when the relationship is mutual, so try to keep the two lists roughly in sync.



Photograph by Diane Wehr

## YOU WANT YOUR PICTURE TO BE A TOP POST

When this picture was posted on June 20, after 10 hours, and with only 130 likes, it was a top post on 21 of my 28 hashtags.

I value being a “top post” on Instagram more than I value the number of likes or the number of followers.

If your interest, as a hobbyist photographer, is to have your pictures seen by as many people as possible, then working toward becoming a top post is a good strategy.

When you are a top post, anyone who looks at that hashtag collection **will see your post.**



As was mentioned earlier in the guide, the Instagram community does not know how the algorithm for choosing top posts really works.

One thing that does not seem to have much impact is having a large number of likes on the picture.

I am periodically a top post on #olympus, which is a relatively large hashtag collection. My post will have about 100 likes, while every other post in the group may have thousands of likes.

It has been suggested that a lot of engagement from your followers does help. This is the reason why you need a “healthy” group of followers. Perhaps it is a reward to posters who have been active participants.

Whatever it is, **my true Instagram success** is being a top post. I wish I could tell you exactly how to be a top post, but I can only tell you what I do, and that it works for me.

1. Be consistent about using hashtag lists. If my picture is black & white, taken with the Olympus camera, and processed with Snapseed, I post the 26 tags in my list titled “Olympus B&W.” Warning: It is sometimes recommended that different

hashtags should be used so that Instagram will not block you for being a robot. I have not had that problem, but I do use more than one list and always add at least two unique tags. Also, I add my hashtags as part of my initial post rather than as a comment to the post. That practice is also recommended to keep Instagram from identifying a post as a robot post.

2. Be clever with your caption as it can help to generate comments. I often have people tell me how my posts create such diverse comments. That is my goal!
3. It is a common practice to acknowledge every single comment with, at the very least, a thank you. I generally wait until the next day, but I will respond to really interesting comments to help keep the momentum going. I keep track of who I have responded to by “liking” their comment, because then a red heart shows up next to their comment. I also go to every single commenter’s gallery and like and comment on one or more of their posts. This is a time-consuming extra step, but I am willing to put in this effort to build my number of followers.

4. Work toward building a loyal group of followers. There are about 10, maybe more, followers who comment on every single one of my posts. You can bet that I comment on every single one of theirs. It is not a duty; it is a pleasure.
5. Check your hashtags regularly. You cannot know if you are a top post if you do not look. You do this by clicking on a hashtag you have put in your post. I know I have to cross a threshold of about 100 likes to be a top post on most of my tags. That is when I check. If a hashtag does not have many posts, fewer likes will be required to be a top post in that collection. I use a few really small hashtags; that is, collections that have a total of 4000 posts or less. You should use some small hashtags as well.

ⓘ **Note:** If you'd like to improve your composition skills for better Instagram images, grab a copy of Photzy's best-selling premium guide, *Advanced Composition*.



Photograph by Diane Wehr

## IN SUMMARY

The process of building my Instagram community has made me a better photographer. For one thing, I am much more deliberate about going out on photo shoots. When you post a picture every day, and you are raising your personal bar on the quality of the picture you are willing to post, you had better be out creating a lot of pictures. Seeing the work of other photographers gives me inspiration to try new things. It also helps me clarify my likes, and dislikes, in the various genres of photography. **I encourage you to jump in!**

### Self Check Quiz:

1. What are three measures of success for an Instagram account?
2. What kinds of expectations does the Instagram community have for an account?
3. What kinds of hashtags do you think will be useful for your Instagram account?
4. How do you find hashtags to use?



## About the Author



Diane Wehr is an amateur photographer and author with a particular interest in street and travel photography. She travels far and wide with her Olympus Mirrorless camera.

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