Managing Virtual Support Teams

"Trust men [people]and they will be true to you;
treat them greatly, and they will show themselves great."

-- Ralph Waldo Emerson

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John Hamilton
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Before We Get Started

- The Webinar is " listen only" and is being recorded

- A link to the session recording and a PDF of the slide deck will be sent to all registrants afterwards

- To submit questions, use the Question Panel of the GoToWebinar console

- Visit the Service Strategies Network group on LinkedIn to continue today's discussion

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- **Resource Planning and Utilization**

- **After Hours Staffing for Field Service**

- **Service Industry Outlook Reports**

- **Industry Compensation Studies (with ASP)**

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Community Webinars

- **Customer Success Management**

- **Customer Experience Management**

- **Strategic Account Management**

- **Productizing Services, Service Models**

- **Staff Development, Employee Engagement**

- **Leveraging Alternative Service Channels**

Webinars highlight trends, and best practices from our community to SCP Certified Clients and Partners

John Hamilton
President, Service Strategies

John has more than twenty years of software engineering and service industry experience. He has significant international experience from working in both the Asia-Pacific and European regions. In addition to his support management knowledge, John has a well-rounded background from managing engineering, quality control, and training organizations. He successfully re-engineered a number of large support operations – increasing their efficiency and elevating their service to world class. He has also developed RFP's for selecting support automation technology and managed the implementation of the tools, creating a quick return on investment for support operations.

Big Increase in Remote Jobs in 2015

- As part of FlexJobs analysis of telecommuting jobs listed on in 2015, they looked at the rise in remote jobs over the last several years. Telecommuting job listings increased a solid 36 percent from 2014 to 2015, compared to a 26 percent increase from 2013 to 2014.

- It appears that not only is remote working on the rise, but opportunities to work from home are increasing at a faster rate.

Top 45 companies that hire remote/work from home employees

Companies marked with ** are FlexJobs Featured Employers. These companies partner directly with FlexJobs to post their remote and flexible job openings, and to attract the best talent.

1. LiveOps **
2. TeleTech **
3. Amazon **
4. Sutherland Global Services **
5. UnitedHealth Group **
6. Dell **
7. IBM
8. U.S. Department of Agriculture **
9. Working Solutions **
10. Humana **
11. Aetna **
12. Intuit **
13. Kaplan **
14. Kelly Services **
15. Cactus Communications **

16. Westat **
17. Salesforce **
18. PAREXEL **
19. CyberCoders
20. American Express **
21. VMware **
22. SAP **
23. Xerox **
24. First Data **
25. US-Reports **
26. Oracle
27. CACI International
28. A Place for Mom
29. Anthem, Inc. **
30. Dell SecureWorks

31. World Travel Holdings **
32. ADP **
33. Aon **
34. University of Maryland University College **
35. Allergan Inc
36. K12 **
37. U.S. Department of Transportation **
38. CSI Companies
39. Robert Half **
40. Nielsen **
41. Red Hat **
42. Adobe Systems
43. Overland Solutions, Inc. **
44. BCD Travel
45. Connections Education **

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Top 3 Companies Where You Can Work from Home
(Customer/Technical Support Positions)

1. Apple

Tech giant Apple has an At Home Advisor position that allows employees to work remotely *as customer support agents*. The role, according to the company's description, allows employees to be heroic from the comfort of their own home by translating technology into a language customers can understand. The position offers benefits such as employee discounts, the opportunity to grow with Apple, and a free iMac to use while working from home. The job is also a great gig for college students, who can schedule their work around classes.

2. Xerox

Xerox has an extensive WFH program of over 8,000 home-based employees, which is known as the *Virtual Workforce Program*. Home-based employees are involved in a variety of functions, including *customer care*, *tech support*, quality control, software development, and much more. The company acknowledges many benefits of its Virtual Workforce Program for employees: They have lower commuting costs, a comfortable work environment, and a better work/life balance, which increases job satisfaction.

3. Dell

Although Dell is headquartered in Round Rock, Texas, the company offers employee work options that include flextime, remote work, job sharing, part-time work, and compressed workweeks. Current openings for flexible jobs at Dell include *senior-adviser*, engineer, and executive positions.

# Successfully Building and Managing Virtual Support Teams

"Virtual" commonly refers to working from home, though the term may also reference a "distributed" team, meaning a team whose members are distributed across several geographical locations.

Building a Team

- Hiring the right people—employees who are trustworthy

- Strong communicators

- Self-motivated, self-regulating, self-managing

- Capable of balancing their workload and extracurricular activities

- Confident and comfortable making decisions when other team members/managers are not immediately available

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Three Dimensions of Virtual Support

Members of Virtual Teams are
often separated by one or more
of these three dimensions . . .

Distance

Time

Culture

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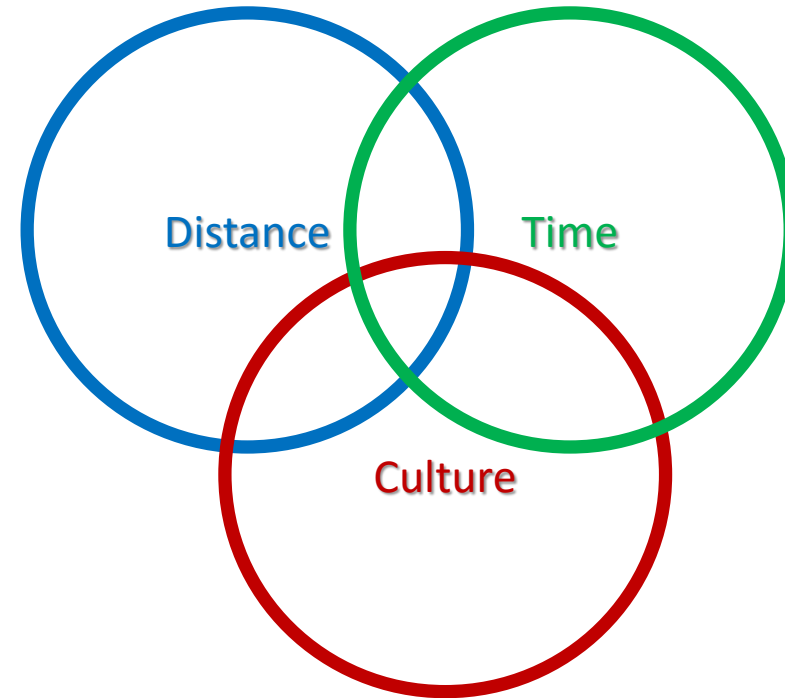
Three Dimensions of Virtual Support

- **Distance**
  - Managing people from a distance has some unique challenges and the old coverall of always being able to walk around, see, and talk to everyone is not available to remote managers.

- **Culture**
  - Nationality is not the only cultural difference. Cultural differences can also stem from race, religion, gender, education and other socioeconomic differences.

- **Time**
  - People on virtual teams often reside in different time zones, have differing work hours and have differing beliefs regarding the use and importance of time.

* Condensed from the "Manager's Guide to Virtual Teams"

The need for trust – the common denominator of all successful virtual teams

" You can't have success without trust. The word trust embodies almost everything you can strive for that will help you to succeed. You tell me any human relationship that works without trust, whether it is a marriage or a friendship or a social interaction; in the long run, the same thing is true about business, especially businesses that deal with the public."

—Jim Burke, Former Chairman and CEO, Johnson & Johnson
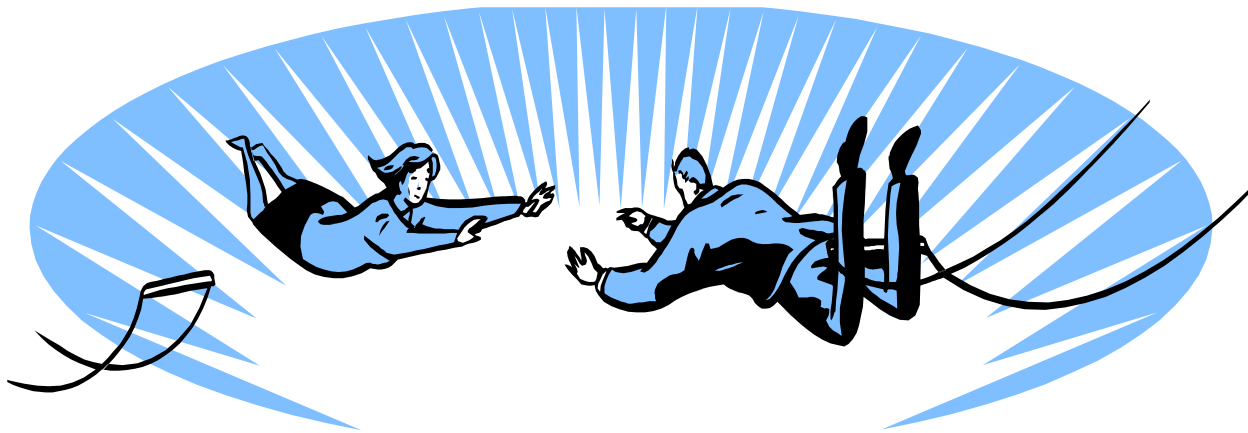
The Economics of Trust

- **The level of <u>Trust</u> always effects two outcomes– <u>Speed</u> and <u>Costs</u>.**

- When Trust goes down, Speed will also go down and Costs will go up.

$$\downarrow \textbf{Trust} = \downarrow \textbf{Speed} \uparrow \textbf{Costs}$$

- When Trust goes up, Speed will also go up and Costs will go down

$$\uparrow \textbf{Trust} = \uparrow \textbf{Speed} \downarrow \textbf{Costs}$$

—Stephen M. R. Covey author of The Speed of Trust: The
One Thing That Changes Everything

The Distance Dimension

In many ways, managers new to telemanaging or telecommuting are discovering something that Field Service Managers have known all along. "Distance" working relationships make it harder for managers to identify and acknowledge desired behavior and performance. These challenges can best be met in an environment where reciprocal trust is present between the manager and the support agents.
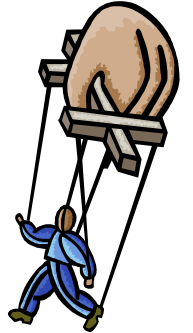
Distance

Time

Culture
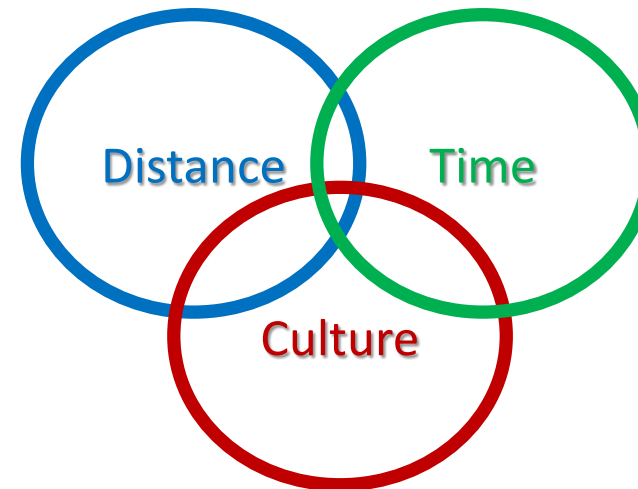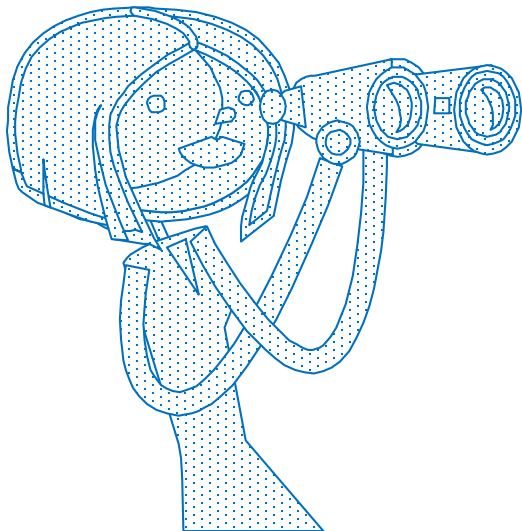
The Problem with Control from a Distance*

Virtual team members often feel distrusted or inadequate if their work environment is based on hierarchically generated control. This negatively affects their work. When workers feel over-controlled by management, they tend to act in one of the following ways:

1. They become compliant and dependent on the manager;
2. They resist the controls and find ways to play games to get around them; or
3. They become indifferent or apathetic.

Each of these states reduces trust and speed, increases costs and promotes a lower level of employee performance..

What Virtual Team members need from their leader

- If you ask team members what they want from a distance manager, you seldom hear them ask for more autocracy, hierarchy, or bureaucracy.

- More clarity, yes; definite priorities, sure; a sense of direction, absolutely.

- Virtual Team members consistently make 10 requests of their leaders and they generally want the same things that you want from your leader.
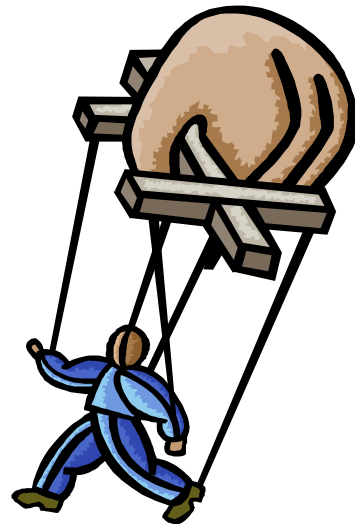
Virtual Team members consistently make 10 requests of their leaders

1. Coordination Rather Than Control

2. Accessibility Rather Than Inaccessibility or Omnipresence

3. Information Without Overload

4. Feedback Instead of Advice.

5. Fairness Over Favoritism

6. Decisiveness But Not Intrusive Supervision

7. Honesty Rather Than Manipulation

8. Concern for Development Versus Apathy

9. Community Building versus Coordinated Isolation

10. Respect Versus Paternalism or Condescension
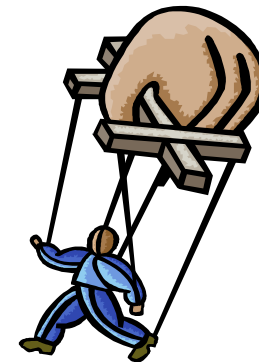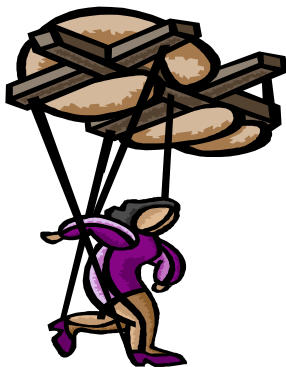
The Cultural Dimension

- We can't help but to see other cultures through the lens of our own experience. When we do so, we are judging another's behavior against our standard, not against that person's cultural standard (in which that person's behavior makes perfect sense).

- To be sensitive to the cultures of others, it helps to understand how our own cultural background influences our thinking and behavior. This allows us to see that our way is only one of the many ways in which the world can make sense to someone.

- Even if we don't become experts in all cultures, we will learn to be sensitive to the cultural views of others.

Distance   Time

Culture

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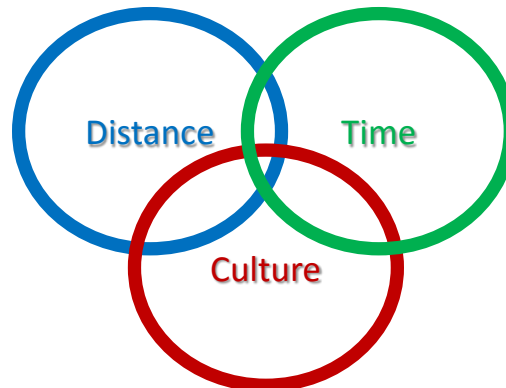
The Cultural Dimension

Anthropologist and cross-cultural researcher, Edward T. Hall exerted an unprecedented influence on cultural anthropology. His contribution to the study of High vs. low Context Cultures relative to time, personal interactions and communications as cultural phenomena is particularly significant.

According to Hall, culture:

- **Is a learned set of shared interpretations**
- **Is about beliefs, values, and norms**
- **Affects the behavior of a relatively large group of people**

Cultural Continuum

High Context / Pluralistic / Polychronic

Japan

China

Korea

Middle East (Arab)

South America

Eastern Europe

Britain

France

Canada

Australia

United States

Scandinavia

Germany

Low Context / Individualistic / Monochronic

High and Low - Context Cultures*

Association: **High Context / Collectivism**

- Identity is as a member of a group.

- How things get done depends on relationships with people and attention to group process.

- Relationships build up slowly and are stable. One distinguishes between people inside and people outside one's circle.

- Social structure and authority are centralized; responsibility is at the top. Person at top works for the good of the group.

- In conflict, response is chosen jointly

Low Context / Individualism

- Identity is individual

- Things get done by following procedures and paying attention to the goal.

- Relationships begin and end quickly. Many people can be inside one's circle; circle's boundary is not clear.

- Social structure is decentralized; responsibility goes further down (is not concentrated at the top).

- In conflict, response is individual

* Note: this distinction does not describe a dichotomy, but rather poles on a continuum. Individual people and situations will vary widely.

High and Low - Context Cultures*

Communications:

	High Context / Collectivism	**Low Context / Individualism**

High Context / Collectivism

- Communication is seen as an art form—a way of engaging someone.

- Verbal message is implicit; context (situation, people, nonverbal elements) is more important than words.

- Verbal message is indirect; one talks around the point and embellishes it.

Time:

- Polychronic - Everything has its own time. What is important is that the activity gets done.

- Time is a process; it belongs to others and to nature.

Low Context / Individualism

- Communication is seen as a way of exchanging information, ideas, and opinions.

- Verbal message is explicit. Context is less important than words.

- Verbal message is direct; one spells things out exactly.

- Monochronic - Things are scheduled to be done at particular times. What is important is that activity is done efficiently.

- Time is a commodity to be spent or saved. One's time is one's own.

Low-context communicators **dealing with high-context** communicators should remember:

- Nonverbal messages/gestures are important
- Status and identity may be communicated nonverbally
- Face-saving and tact are important
- Building a good relationship may be essential
- Indirect routes and creative thinking may be important

High-context communicators **dealing with low-context** communicators should remember:

- Statements may be taken at face value
- Roles and functions may be decoupled from status
- A sustained focus on tasks may be necessary
- Direct questions are not meant to offend
- Indirect cues may be ineffectual

The Time Dimension

- **Strive for clarity within your team relative to expectations regarding time and business milestones.**
  - Monochronic time: Remember, in a typical American company (lower context), the social measure of time is an individual. A single decision-maker is the one most likely to set expectations for the milestones and completion of a project.

  - Polychronic time: For higher context people, a social measure of time is often a community. It is only after long deliberations with everyone involved that the typical head of a project in the Arab world decides on the course of events in completing a project.

Distance   Time

Culture

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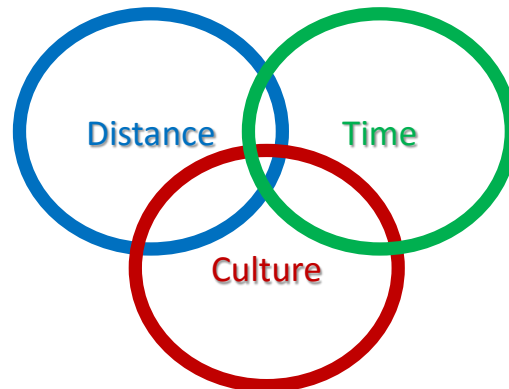
The Time Dimension

- **Respect Time Zones**
  - When the team includes individuals from multiple time zones, establish protocols about appropriate times to call. Make sure that everyone gets the opportunity to get up in the middle of the night for teleconferences, rather than limiting that requirement to a few team members.

  - Also, respect people's personal time. It is best to avoid frequently scheduling calls that require individuals to come in early or stay well past the close of their workday. While this is to be expected on an occasional basis, doing so too often can burn people out.

Distance   Time

Culture

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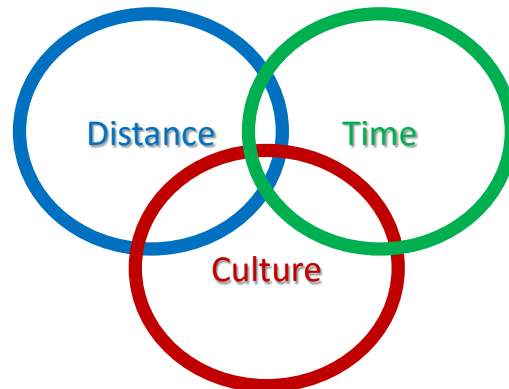
Creating an Effective Team Culture:

- Teams benefit from diversity. It naturally enriches their thinking, instills greater creativity, and provides a cross-section of skills.

- But how does the team overcome the myriad of challenges that cultural differences may introduce and still perform at exceptional levels?

- It's useful to work on understanding your own cultural biases first, and then be open to discussions about how culture affects others on your team. Nonetheless, the great majority of virtual teams find that they need to create a culture of their own that allows all members to reap the benefits of diversity while focusing on key business elements and values that they have in common.

Tools for Managing Virtual Teams

Tools that foster easy communication, promote efficiency and collaboration, and are secure, are huge assets when managing virtually. It's important to train the team on the use and administration of relevant tools, as well as to set expectations around team processes and policies. Working toward transparency is key.

Tools for creating an effective team culture:

- Three tools that facilitate the creation of a sound virtual team culture are:
  - Develop a Balanced Scorecard and Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for the team
  - Develop Shared Team Values
  - Develop Shared Team Communications Protocols – telephone, email, voice mail, video calling, instant messaging and texting.
- These three tools derive their power from the fact that they are agreed upon by all of the team members.

Team Communications Protocols . . . Examples

Agreed upon protocols should be put in place for all types of communications technology used by the team. Including a list of accepted and understood text abbreviations.

Sample E-Mail protocols:

- We will clearly identify the subject of the message in the subject line.

- All e-mail messages will be short (no scrolling required) and to the point.

- E-mail will not be used for philosophical debates.

- E-mail will not be used for urgent messages.

Sample Texting protocols:

- Text messages will be no longer than 160 characters.

- We will not text while driving.

- We will use an agreed upon list of text abbreviations. e.g. M8 – Mate; GR8 – Great; H8 – Hate; L8R – Later; TMOT – Trust me on this

http://www.textetiquette.com

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Risks of Going Virtual

- Working different shifts can cause delays in communication—and miscommunication or lack of communication can be costly.

- Lack of visibility - falling into the "out of sight, out of mind" vortex

- Dedicated remote employees actually run the risk of overworking. Overworking can lead to burnout.

- Lack of knowledge/information sharing between team members

- Managing communication, promoting efficiency and collaboration can be more challenging

Benefits of Going Virtual

- Quality Talent (no physical boundaries of talent pool)

- Easier to offer 24/7/365 Tier 1 Support (remote support can actively support their time zone)

- Timely Support Response Time

- Removing a commute can add hours back to the day, allowing more flexibility

- Focus and priority of a virtual team stays where it belongs: on the work (less on in-office distractions)

Summary Best Practices

- Communicate as frequently and proactively as you expect your team to

- Say hello in the morning or at the beginning of a shift

- Consider tools that will help your team work remotely— such as tablets, headphones, phone upgrades, IP phones, etc.

- Award comp time when extra hours are needed to support increased call/support volumes

- Virtual surprises - award outstanding performance: gift card delivered via email

- Invite remote workers to team building events such as lunch or dinner, happy hours, meet-n-greets,

- Providing perks, rewards, and opportunities to socialize and have fun will keep the team connected.

Final thought . . .

If you build an effective team culture, act like a sensitive and caring person, apologize when you err, and create a team based on reciprocal trust, you will likely be forgiven most of your cultural trespasses.

Sources

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How to Successfully Build and Manage a Virtual Team

https://www.zendesk.com/

Thank You

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