

The *Definitive* Guide for

Dealing with

EXTREMELY  
DIFFICULT  
PEOPLE



“Don’t wish it were easier. Wish you were better.” — JIM ROHN

# INTRODUCTION

This guide is *dedicated* to Katie.

When you think of a dedication in a book or a guide like this one, it’s safe to assume that the dedication is usually given to a beloved family member or a close friend, right?

**Not in this case.**

Katie is not a friend of mine, a family member, or even someone who I remotely like as a person.

Katie is the name (*okay, it’s not her real name*) of the most difficult person who I have ever worked with in my life.

She was rude, incredibly combative, self-absorbed, passive-aggressive, completely lacking in self-awareness, and quite possibly the most mean-spirited person who I have ever had the displeasure of knowing.

Simply put, “Katie” was (and probably still is) an extremely difficult person.

Unfortunately for me, during the time that I worked with her, she made my life a living hell because I was completely unaware of the very simple tips that you’re about to read in this guide.

My hope is that you’ll be able to use the tips in this guide to save yourself from the unnecessary drama, mental anguish, and sleepless nights that I had to endure when I worked with this woman on a daily basis.

The late, great motivational speaker Jim Rohn said it best in the quote above.

## Don't wish it were easier.

Believe me, every night when I went to bed, I wished that it would be easier. I wished that Katie would wake up and miraculously become a kinder person.

Little did I know at the time that “wishing for it to be easy” is an incredibly foolish goal.

A lot of things in life will never be easy—especially dealing with the most difficult people in our lives. And truthfully, that's okay.

## That's why *we need to focus* on getting better instead.

If you're still with me and ready to do this, it's time for us to take real action towards becoming better. We need a real strategy to deal with the jerks, bullies, and other extremely difficult people who are making the world a less-than-pleasant place for all of us.

If you've ever wanted a guide for dealing with the extremely difficult people in your life, look no further. What you're about to read will be the last guide that you will ever need on the topic.

Big talk, I know—but that's my goal.

# We have a lot to cover, SO LET'S JUMP IN, MY FRIEND.



# Before we *Get Started*...

Before we talk strategy, I have some good news and some bad news.

## Let's start with the bad news first.

As long as you are alive on this earth, you will never remove difficult people from your life. **Ever.**

I just wanted to put that on the table before we move forward. Not that you weren't already painfully aware of that fact.

This guide isn't about wishing for extremely difficult people to change their ways, see the light, or become kinder people overnight. None of that makes a ton of sense to me, and in most cases, it is a complete waste of time. Instead, there's a much better way to focus our efforts.

*We are going to limit the effect that the extremely difficult people have on our lives, starting today.*

## Here's the good news:

We absolutely can do this, and we will. But there is one very important thing that we're going to have to do first.

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# First of all, we need to determine what makes a person “EXTREMELY DIFFICULT.”

Is it someone who is a habitual liar? Is it someone who can never admit when she's wrong, even in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary? Is it the chronic complainer / woe-is-me pessimist? Is it the lazy coworker who is unwilling to pull his weight around the office or around the house? Is it the passive-aggressive, backstabbing manipulator? Is it the insufferably rude jerk who seemingly gets joy from treating others terribly? Is it the incredibly annoying Know-it-All? Is it the vicious office bully who makes everyone's life at work a living hell?

**To be honest, I don't know.**

I can't define what makes someone extremely difficult, only you can. So, I want you to do that right now.

*I want you to stop and define below who the most difficult person in your life is at this moment **and** put into words why you consider him/her to be extremely difficult.*

**My EXTREMELY DIFFICULT person is:**

*(side note: you might want to use a pseudonym like I did with “Katie,” if you plan on printing out this guide—just sayin’):*

The reason why I consider this person to be **EXTREMELY DIFFICULT** is:

It could be your boss, your coworker, your neighbor, your significant other, your family member, or your friend (side note: if the most difficult person in your life is one of your friends, then you probably know the obvious question you should be asking yourself right now). It doesn't matter who it is, but it does matter that you have a person in your mind before you read any further.

Seriously, do you have that person in your mind **and** have you explained why you think this person is extremely difficult? Please don't go forward until you do.

*Okay, good.*

I want you to think  
about that person  
as you work through  
**THE SEVEN STEPS**  
**IN THIS GUIDE.**



#1

# DON'T BE DIFFICULT YOURSELF

“I am thankful for the difficult people in my life. They have shown me exactly who I don't want to be.”

— ANONYMOUS



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It's possible that you could read this step and think, "Umm...what does this have to do with dealing my extremely difficult person?"

## Potentially, quite a bit.

This is unquestionably the most overlooked step in dealing with extremely difficult people.

Before we can begin the process of dealing with anyone else, we must start here and sincerely check ourselves first.

**So, let's do *exactly* that.**

Here's the part of the guide where you absolutely must be brutally honest with yourself.

Please take a moment to answer the following questions **WITH A SIMPLE "YES" OR A "NO."**

- *Have you ever been described as having an "attitude problem"?*
- *Do you feel like you're constantly running into difficult people at home, at work, at the store, while you're driving in traffic, etc.?*
- *Do you often place blame for your problems on other people while thinking that most (if not, all) of your problems are not your fault?*
- *Are you very critical of other people or do you criticize other people often?*
- *Do you rarely admit when you're wrong?*
- *Do you lose your temper often?*





The truth is that if you answered “yes” to more than one of those questions, it’s very possible that you could be considered an extremely difficult person yourself.

If so, in addition to the remaining six steps below, I urge you to take the time to focus on becoming more aware your own emotions and behavior as well.

Don’t be like the overwhelming majority of difficult people who don’t believe that they are being difficult.

If you don’t believe that’s true, take a moment to think of the extremely difficult person that you listed in the previous section. Do you think that he truly and sincerely views himself as an extremely difficult person?

Probably not. Truthfully, that’s a large part of the problem.

The good news is that you don’t have to be like the extremely difficult person who you listed earlier. Just the fact that you’re now aware of your potential difficult behavior, and that you’re willing to do something about it already places you in a far better place than that person.

**That’s because you’ve chosen to be part of the solution instead of the problem.**

And without a doubt, the biggest part of the solution is to always start with ourselves first.

However, with all of that said, it’s very possible that you answered “no” to all of the previous questions, and you’re 100% certain that it’s the other person who is the extremely difficult one, not you.

**FAIR ENOUGH. If so, let’s move on to Step 2.**

#2

# LET GO OF THE NEED TO BE RIGHT

“The need to be right all the time is  
the biggest bar to new ideas.”

— EDWARD DE BONO



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In college, I remember one of my Psychology professors telling the class that the need to be right is a telltale sign of emotional immaturity.

It took me years to truly understand what she meant by that statement, but I get it now.

Oftentimes when we're doing battle with difficult people, it feels so important to win the fight. For some reason, it is even more important to make sure that the other person *knows* that we're right.

*Believe me,* **there was no one in the world who fought harder at being right than me.**

That is, until I had a much-needed epiphany that came to me as a result of asking myself some pretty tough questions, such as these:

- *So what if I'm right?*
- *Why is it so important for me to prove that I'm right to the other person?*
- *What if I do finally prove that I'm right and I win the argument—then what?*

Sadly, I couldn't really answer those questions. The best answer that I could come up with was:  
*"I'll feel better if I'm right."*

The mind-numbing awfulness of that answer made me realize that there must be a better way.

If my goal was simply to feel better, why not skip through all of the arguing and drama, and go straight to the "feeling better" part?



More times than I'm willing to admit in this guide, I argued tooth and nail with Katie in an attempt to be right. I spent so much of my workday trying to "one-up" her by proving to her and any coworkers who would listen, that I was right.

Sometimes I was right, sometimes Katie was right. But do you know one thing that I **never** was during all of that time?

**HAPPY.**

**My life changed instantly when I finally dismissed the completely unnecessary need to "be right" and I chose to be happy instead.**

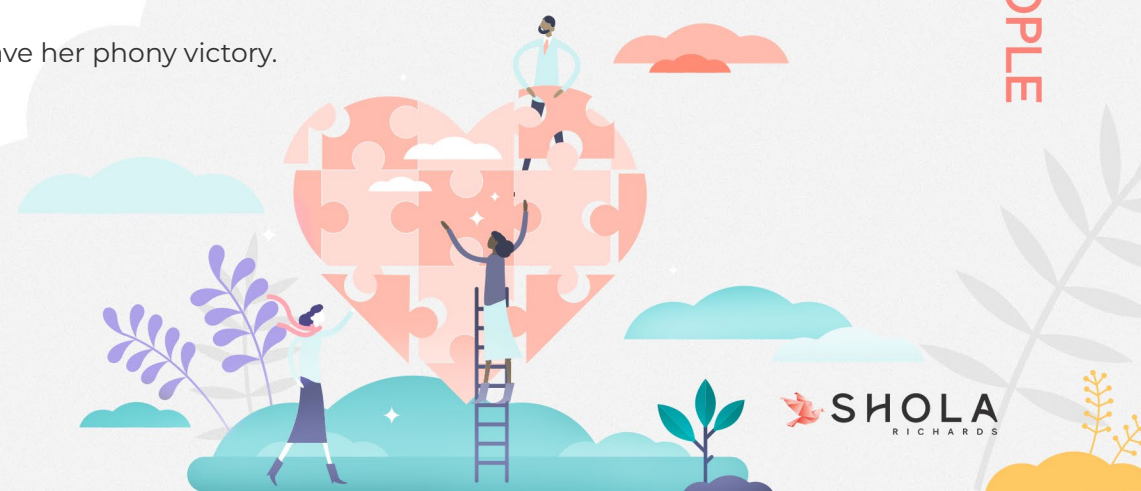
I cannot stress enough how important your happiness should be to you. If it's not priority #1 in your life, it should be pretty damn close.

Being happy is a full-time job, and the steadfast refusal to engage in the mindless drama, petty silliness, and downright stupidity of needing to be right can bring you more happiness than you've ever imagined.

These days when I'm in a discussion with someone and I know that I'm right, and the other person is unable (or unwilling) to see it my way, I simply state my case and then let it go.

If the other person needs to be "right" so badly, she can have her phony victory.

I would much rather enjoy the very real victory of keeping my peace of mind, my sanity, and my happiness instead.



#3

# CHANGE THE WAY YOU VIEW DIFFICULT PEOPLE

*“When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change.”*

— DR. WAYNE DYER



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For most of my adult life, I have been a huge fan of the late Dr. Wayne Dyer's work, and his quote at the beginning of this section has stuck with me from the moment I first read it.

Changing the way that we look at things is a very powerful idea, and it's worth examining deeper.

Let's revisit the extremely difficult person who you identified earlier.

Remember I asked you to describe why you considered that person to be extremely difficult?

Maybe it was because that person is unbelievably rude, judgmental, mean, passive-aggressive, arrogant, or incredibly negative. If you're really being honest, maybe you've labeled that person with a not-so-flattering nickname, either privately or publicly.

Interestingly enough, if you choose to look at that person a little more deeply, you'll see the true core of the extremely difficult person.

**The EXTREMELY DIFFICULT person at their core is living in fear.**

If you really break it down, every human action is driven by either one of two emotions: love or fear.

**THAT'S IT.**

**Anyone who consistently acts in a way that hurts others by being rude, selfish, arrogant, or judgmental is driven by fear.**



- *They fear being insignificant.*
- *They fear being powerless.*
- *They fear being ignored.*
- *They fear not being in control.*
- *They fear being embarrassed.*
- *They fear being inadequate.*

These fears, as well as other fears that are too numerous to mention in this guide, can make people act in crazy ways.

I'm not saying this so you can drop what you're doing right now to "hug it out" with the person who is making your life a living nightmare, but it can help you enormously in understanding what drives the difficult person's behavior.

Nowadays when I look at someone who finds it necessary to act like a total jerk on a daily basis, instead of building up resentment towards them, I just limit my interactions with that person and send him love.

I know, I know—that sounds so "Hallmark Movie of the Week," but seriously, that's what I do. If my only choices are "love" or "fear," shouldn't I make the choice that will keep me happy and sane?

For some reason, when I look at a rude and hateful person as someone who is riddled with fear instead of as a big, bad bully, I tend to find the person's outbursts, rudeness, and lack of emotional intelligence much less threatening.

*Remember,* **it's the people who are the biggest jerks in this world who probably need your kindness the most.**

#4

# KILL THEM WITH KINDNESS

“Harboring resentment is like drinking poison  
and expecting the other person to die.”

— ANONYMOUS



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# This one is MUCH EASIER SAID THAN DONE.

Usually the last thing that we want to do when dealing with an extremely difficult person is to kill them with kindness. Instead, we may find it much more satisfying to buy a sword, name it “Kindness” and *then* kill them with kindness, right?

**Don't get any ideas, *please*.**

In all seriousness, there's a reason why this advice has withstood the test of time—it's because it has an amazing success rate.

If a difficult person constantly has her rudeness met with your kindness, there are three clear benefits:

1. *The difficult person will realize that her behavior has no effect on your happiness and she'll find some other place to spread her dark cloud.*
2. *The difficult person may use your kindness as an example to become a better person. And yes, this is more possible than you may think.*
3. *You get to rise above the negativity and show the difficult person (and the rest of the world) that you won't allow another person's rudeness to control your behavior.*

The days of fighting fire with fire—or more specifically, rudeness with even more rudeness—has to stop. That's the same kiddie table foolishness that got us into this mess in the first place.

Someone has to be the bigger person to break the cycle, right? That's exactly what I'm asking you to do, if you're up for the challenge.

And trust me, it is a challenge, but it's a challenge worth accepting. I personally use this strategy often, and as always, it helps to shift my focus from the other person's rudeness to what's truly important.

## Being *happy* and *at peace*.

Being kind only when someone is willing to be kind to us isn't going to make the world a kinder place. Equally as bad (if not worse), is making the choice to turn into a complete jerk when dealing with a person who isn't willing to be kind to us.

If nothing else, when faced with the decision to be kind or to "fight fire with fire," remember this:

**A small light can make a HUGE DIFFERENCE in a sea of darkness.**

The choice to  
**BE THAT LIGHT**  
is always yours.



#5

# BE ASSERTIVE NOT AN ASS

“The most common way that people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any.”

— ALICE WALKER



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While “Killing Them with Kindness” is an incredibly powerful strategy, I’m not naive. Just like any strategy, it won’t work 100% of the time.

## In those cases, it’s time to raise your game and choose to be assertive.

But first things first—can we please put to bed once **and** for all, the ridiculous idea that it’s not possible to be kind and assertive? Remember, there’s nothing kind about being a doormat.

Having standards for how we should be treated and for what we’re willing to accept (and not accept) in our lives, doesn’t make us rude, mean, or a jerk—**it makes us responsible adults.**

If you’re at a place where the extremely difficult person is really starting to get on your nerves, then it’s time to take action.

This is best done by being specific about the issue, focusing on the behavior—not the person, and using “I/me/we” language instead of “you” language.

## For Example:

- Instead of saying, “**you are such a negative person,**” you could say, “**I’m feeling really drained by these negative conversations, and I’d like to talk about something else.**”
- Instead of saying, “**you’re always interrupting me in meetings,**” you could say, “**I would like to finish my thought without being interrupted.**”
- Instead of saying, “**you are totally out of control and you need to calm down,**” you could say, “**it’s very difficult for me to have a productive conversation when you are raising your voice and slamming your fist on the table.**”



## See what I mean?

None of the above should be considered mean or nasty. They're just simple and assertive.

Looking back on it now, when I was dealing with Katie, even though I would disagree with her every now and then, I never really stood up to her, or stood up for myself.

For some reason, I really believed that doing so would mean that I was part of the problem.

I couldn't have been any more wrong.

It took me years after dealing with Katie to realize that it was possible to be kind and assertive. Once I finally took this knowledge and put it into practice, I instantly stopped being a doormat and having my kindness taken for granted when dealing with other extremely difficult people.

## Remember, a huge part of being kind is BEING KIND TO YOURSELF.

Being assertive doesn't mean that you're being an ass. It means that you are standing up for yourself and consistently showing yourself the love that you deserve.

**And yes, without any shadow  
of a doubt, you deserve  
every ounce of it.**



#6

# STOP RESPONDING EMOTIONALLY

“He who controls others may be powerful, but he who has mastered himself is mightier still.”

— LAO TZU



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In my opinion, this step is one of the best techniques in dealing with extremely difficult people. Unfortunately though, it's also one of the hardest techniques to pull off too.

Many years ago, I used to work with a woman (no, not "Katie") who used to be hyper-critical of all of my work. It was so over the top, and it drove me insane.

Unfortunately, at the time, I wasn't aware of any of the steps this guide, but completely by accident, I did find a way to deal with her that worked like a charm.

## What I failed to realize was that she was *fueled* by my emotional responses.

I remember consistently responding to her constant nitpicking, unsolicited feedback, and destructive criticism by getting really upset.

One day after she sent me one of her trademarked six-paragraph emails to nitpick every aspect of my most recent project, I was too exasperated to fight back, so I simply responded with two letters.

**OK.**

Shortly afterward, I realized when I finally stopped giving her the emotional response that she was looking for, she eventually stopped.

There is a lot of power in the short response.

By simply saying **"OK"**, **"duly noted"**, or **"thanks"** didn't mean that I agreed with her. It just meant that I wasn't going to get sucked into responding to her with a multi-paragraph, highly-emotional email to show her that I was "right" (which we hopefully now know doesn't matter anyway). Instead, I focused on the small nuggets of information in her email that were useful, and refused to be baited by the other stuff.





When she realized that her nitpicking comments and passive-aggressive behavior didn't get a rise out of me anymore, she moved onto another target and left me completely alone.

The short response and refusing to get emotional, both work like a charm on a person who seems to find joy from starting a fight. If your extremely difficult person loves to pick a fight, just remember this point and point #2 mentioned earlier in this guide.

## YOU DON'T HAVE TO ENGAGE a difficult person in the drama.

However, some things are not worthy of any response at all—short or otherwise.

As a kindness writer and activist, you would think that I'd be immune from receiving hateful and mean-spirited comments, right? **Not exactly.**

I've received quite a few emails, comments, and random hate (both online and in person) that is so off the charts that it definitely doesn't merit any specific acknowledgment (much less, a response) from me.

When I'm faced with that kind of over-the-top-rudeness I remember this step and Step #3 mentioned earlier in this guide, and then I completely ignore the person and I keep it moving. Some people are only happy when they're making other people miserable. Sad, but true.

Obviously, it's pretty tough to ignore your boss, your spouse, or a customer, but if they consistently act in an inappropriate manner towards you, you don't have to respond emotionally. It's always within your power to rise above it.

**Like I said earlier, this isn't easy, but it's a skill that's definitely worth practicing.**



#7

# LEAVE

“It is so much better to be alone than to cling to someone who is already gone.”

— ANONYMOUS



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The final step in this guide is the most drastic, but there are times in life when **desperate times call for desperate measures.**

If you have tried everything above and you still feel like the extremely difficult person's presence in your life has crossed the line from extremely difficult to toxic, then you really have no other choice but to cut the person out of your life.

**LIFE IS TOO SHORT** to allow a boss, a coworker, a friend, a significant other, or even a family member to cause you constant pain and misery.

The hardest part about giving up on a relationship is the fact that there probably used to be a time when the extremely difficult person wasn't so difficult.

- *You might choose to romanticize the few good days that you shared together and minimize the many bad days.*
- *You might choose to imagine your difficult person as the person you want him to be, instead of the person he is.*
- *And even when faced with a mountain of contrary evidence, you might believe that your difficult person could miraculously wake up one morning and be a completely changed person.*



# If you're being honest with yourself, **YOU KNOW THE TRUTH.**

There will be a time when there's no choice but to accept that the difficult person in your life is not going to change. The moment you make that realization, it is time to confidently walk away from the pain and choose more for yourself.

If you've tried the previous six steps in this guide, and the extremely difficult person in your life is still having a consistently toxic effect on your health, your happiness, and your sanity, then you know what you need to do.

# Leave.

**It may not be easy, but it is necessary.**

Especially if you value your health, your happiness, and your sanity.

And believe me, more than anything else on this earth, you should.



# THE ENLIGHTENED MASTER

Let's face it, dealing with EXTREMELY DIFFICULT people, is well, difficult.

Even so, there is one story that I heard a few years ago that has helped me enormously when dealing with difficult and mean-spirited people in my life. Hopefully it will have the same effect on you too:

*One day, there was an enlightened master who was famous for remaining positive in the face of any kind of negativity. There was a man who knew about his reputation and he traveled many miles to test the master. Surely, the man would be able to break the master somehow.*

*When the man finally arrived and stood before the master, he verbally abused the master in the most vicious manner possible. He insulted the master, challenged his manhood, and did anything possible in an attempt to verbally destroy the master.*

*The master was not fazed at all. He simply looked the man in the eyes and said, "may I ask you a question?"*

*The man said, "yeah, what?"*

*The master said, "If someone offers you a gift and you refuse to accept it, to whom does the gift belong?"*

*The man said, "It belongs to the person who offered it."*

*The master smiled, "Exactly."*

*The man stood in stunned silence before he lowered his head and slowly walked away.*

# YOUR DIFFICULT PERSON

Remember the extremely difficult person who you identified earlier? You might have thought that this guide was about the difficult person, but it wasn't. I didn't have the power to change my ex-coworker Katie, and you don't have the power to change your extremely difficult person either.

**Because of that fact, this guide couldn't be about your extremely difficult person. This guide was about you.**

You will deal with that extremely difficult person after you're done reading this guide. Count on it. It's how you choose to react to the extremely difficult person that is yet to be determined. When you do encounter your extremely difficult person again, I want you to remember this: making the world a kinder place isn't up to the difficult people in your life, it's up to you to do the right thing.

Simply put, you can choose to be a part of the problem or part of the solution. Unlike the person you identified earlier, this choice isn't extremely difficult. But that doesn't mean it will be easy, either.

**Even so, there's *no doubt* in my mind that you can do this.**

Extremely difficult people may always be in our lives in one way or another, but the negative effect that they have on us can be stopped, starting today.

## Good luck.



# THANK YOU!

I sincerely appreciate you taking the time to read this guide, I really hope that you found it useful in dealing with the extremely difficult people in your life. If you're interested in more goodness like this guide, feel free to check out the links below:

Want to learn more about my mission to bring *kindness* to the workplace and the world?

- Visit my website: [www.SholaRichards.com](http://www.SholaRichards.com)
- Listen to The Kindness Extremist Podcast: [Apple Podcasts](#) OR [Spotify](#)
- View my speaker reel: [Shola's Speaker Reel](#)
- Connect with me on LinkedIn: [www.linkedin.com/in/sholarichards](http://www.linkedin.com/in/sholarichards)
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- Send me an email at: [Shola@SholaRichards.com](mailto:Shola@SholaRichards.com)
- And most of all, if you're looking for a deeper dive on this topic, I highly recommend that you check out one, or all three, of my books.

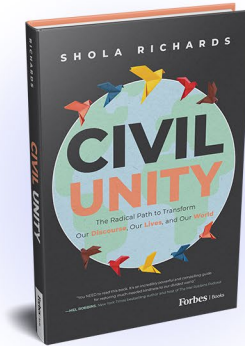
Thanks again for reading! If the words in this free guide have helped even one person to find their strength, courage, and happiness when faced with an extremely difficult person, please know that I will feel incredibly honored.

## UBUNTU,

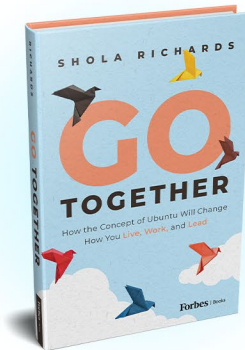
-Shola



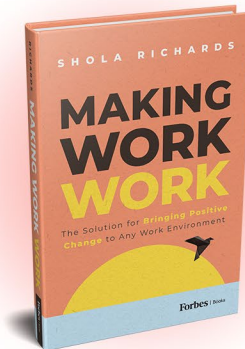
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