**Are the Views of Motivational Mentors and Philosophers Compatible?**

**Abstract**

Ostensibly, the philosophers vs. the motivational mentors belong to another

field of thought and activity. It is assumed that the philosophers belong to the "spiritual world" while the motivational motivators belong to the "world of action." The purpose of this article is to examine whether there is a connection between the advice of philosophers and the advice of motivational mentors how to achieve fulfillment and happiness in life. (Wijnand, van & Igou, 2019). Are there common principles? And if so, what?

In this article, we compare two motivational mentors, Brian Tracy and John C. Maxwell, with three philosophers, Søren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Lucius Annaeus Seneca. We selected Tracy and Maxwell because their rich, broad, and comprehensive ideas have been referred to in the books and lectures of other motivational mentors for several decades, and therefore they can be said to represent, to a large extent, the central ideas of this field. Similarly, the ideas expressed by Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Seneca are found in the works of other philosophers. We find these three to be the best representatives of these core concepts, which they express in depth and in an accessible manner.

This article demonstrates that the motivational mentors Tracy and Maxwell offer three main recommendations in their books and lectures: 1. setting goals; 2. proper use of time; 3. taking action. The two elements of setting goals and taking action are also central in the philosophies of Kierkegaard and Sartre, while Seneca emphasizes the proper use of time. Motivational mentors emphasize the values of economic success, personal fulfillment, and self-realization, while philosophers generally relate to a more inner world of thought. An expression of this is found in Kierkegaard's view that man must choose between God and money (Kierkegaard, 2016). The philosophers and motivational mentors we examine all express the idea that goals are achieved through actions, precise planning, and self-improvement. They teach that what distinguishes between successful and unsuccessful people is not innate or genetic traits, but rather taking responsibility for one’s life and having a deep desire to shape it.

In comparing the ideas of Tracy and Maxwell to those of Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Seneca, we find that their recommendations for how to manage one's life are all quite similar, in that they relate to the three elements of setting goals, proper use of time, and taking action. This article explores philosophical ideas through the observation of motivational mentors, and at the same time examines the motivational mentors through the lens of philosophical thought.

Taking action towards goals in an active and planned manner, through effective self-management, fills life with activity, enriches it, and gives it meaning. Meaning and efficiency in life receive their power from an almost sacred relationship to the resource of time. Philosophers and motivational mentors also discuss how to deal with life obstacles. Further, they offer methods for achieving a meaningful life in this world, without basing their ideas and advice on God or a reward in "next world" (Devine, Hinks & Naveed, 2019).

**Apparent differences between philosophers and motivational mentors**

Fundamental differences between philosophers and motivational mentors have been noted. For example, a central principle for the philosophers is the necessity of clearly defining questions, even when no empirical and/or logical technique can provide absolute answers (Berlin, 1992). Philosophers are willing to address issues even if they remain unresolved and do not lead to practical results. In contrast, motivational mentors try to identify ways to put ideas into practice. Philosophers live in the world of ideas, while mentors live in the world of action and successful realization of goals. Philosophers strive to examine and teach about fundamental ideas and provide general explanations, without pretensions of offering perfect solutions. They avoid the resolution of practice. They address the questions "why" and "what is the essence of this issue?" Mentors claim that they can guide real success. They give advice about how to improve one’s life. They see themselves as teachers of practical methods, not only theoretical ideas. They address the question "how"—specifically how to achieve success.

Another prominent distinguishing different between philosophers and mentors is their target audience. Philosophers address the intellectual elite, while motivational mentors address the general public. Motivational mentors address anyone willing to take responsibility for their life and change negative personal habits. That is, they want to enact a behavioral change, not just a cognitive change in consciousness. We are not advocating one approach or criticizing the other, but rather emphasizing the style of addressing different audiences.

Despite this apparent dichotomy between philosophers and motivational mentors, we demonstrate that the difference between them is far from absolute. Philosophers give practical advice, like motivational mentors, and motivational mentors address fundamental philosophical questions.

**Thesis Statement**

The thesis of this article is that the fundamental motivation of philosophers and motivational mentors is the same: to propose a method by which one can live a fuller and happier life. The philosophers and motivational mentors we discuss offer knowledge, based on logic and life experience, which can lead to a happier and more meaningful life. In general, it can be said that they offer methods based on their desire to help people achieve self-realization and guide them towards success and fulfillment within the unclear and confusing reality of human life. Their advice is not based on concepts of reward and punishment in the World to Come. Rather, their works deal with this world as it is: without illusion, but with hope.

**Literature Review**

The article is based, first and foremost, on philosophical thought, from where we continued to the fields between philosophy and psychology, and from there to the motivational mentors. The following studies do not include the "primary literature" of the philosophers and the motivational mentors.

Articles on Seneca: (Maizeray, L., & Janand, A. 2015),. (Trinacty, C. 2016).Literature about Sartre: Spademan, T. B. (1995),. West, A. (2008),. Baring, E. (2010). Literature on Kierkegaard: Bond, E. (2016). Berthold, D. (2013).

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The authors (Bailey & Fernando, 2012) note that, ''Frankl's … is based on the principle that humans are primarily motivated by a search for meaning and purpose. (p. 140). The study examines the connections between various activities, such as social engagement to the level of happiness. The article concludes with Frankel's assertion that, "…the true meaning of life is to be discovered in the world rather than within man or his own psyche, as though it were a closed system" (Frankl, 2006, p. 110, quoted in Bailey & Fernando, 2012, p. 150). This indicates that questions of happiness and how it relates to the meaning of life Perhaps note that: Frankal's remarks about the meaning of life are appropriate expressions of both the philosophers who preceded him and the motivational mentors who followed him.

Furthermore, the conceptual principle of "meaning" refers to having an appropriate attitude regarding the future. The article, "Assessing stability and change in a second-order confirmatory factor model of meaning in life" states, "A sense of meaning also involves expectations for the future or goals for which to strive," (Krause & Hayward, 2014). Perhaps to add: the motivational mentors and to a large extent, the philosophers also show a link between meaning in life to create goals and expectations for the future.Another expression of this principle is found in the same article: "Goals help people organize their current activities and provide a conduit for focusing and implementing energies, efforts, and ambitions," (Krause & Hayward, 2014). The main principle of the above-mentioned studies is that meaning can be achieved by setting goals and taking actions towards achieving them. In this way, life becomes fuller and more vital.

Zimbardo and Boyd (2008) offer a new direction for referring to time based on empirical scientific research. ''We want to share with you a new science and psychology of time that we developed based on personal, scholarly, and experimental investigation. Your personal attitudes toward time and those that you share with the people around you have a powerful effect on all human nature, yet their importance is underappreciated by most people, academics and lay people alike. This is the first paradox of time your attitudes toward time have profound impact on your life and your world, yet you seldom recognize it," (Zimbardo, P., & Boyd, J. The time paradox: The new psychology of time that will change your life. Simon and Schuster. ‏p.6). In their opinion, the relationship to time is a central factor shaping life, even if one does not consciously pay attention to it. Perhaps to add: both motivational motivators and Seneca strongly emphasize the correct relationship to time.

Managing time correctly has psychological benefits: "The time management of each person for both workplace and personal activities means the management of one's own person as a whole," (Borcoşi, C. A. (2018). (2), 126-133, p.127). This article raises the idea that proper time management is central to "life management." "You have to give yourself daily time to think, to plan, to dream, to create. You will effectively manage your life, time if you will regularly think about who you are, what you want, and how to act to get what you want. Think of where you are today and where you want to be in five years, for example. Analyze the activities you are involved in and determine which ones have a greater impact on your future," (p. 128). Proper planning helps one consider how current actions affect the future. Planning and life management largely depend on determining the major goals of one’s life. "Determine what your values are, what is your purpose in life, what makes you truly happy, fulfilled, means identifying what daily activities are in harmony with the values you appreciate" (ibid., p. 128). People derive their daily activities from the goals they set for themselves.

The article mentioned clearly expresses the three ideas expressed by the motivational mentors and the philosophers: finding goals for life, correct treatment of time and action. These are the directions of thought of the other articles above.

**Goals, time management and action according to the philosophers**

As we have seen, motivational mentors offer three main recommendations for personal development: 1. setting goals; 2. the importance of time; 3. taking action. These ideas also appear in the writings of the philosophers Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Seneca.

**Søren Kierkegaard (1813 –1855): Goals related to actions**

# For the philosophers, setting goals and taking action are intertwined. Kierkegaard wrote in one of his journals "What I really need is to get clear about what I must do, not what I must know, except insofar as knowledge must precede every act. What matters is to find a purpose, to see what it really is that God wills that I shall do; the crucial thing is to find a truth which is truth for me, to find the idea for which I am willing to live and die," (Kierkegaard Journal, Aug 1, 1835).

Kierkegaard expresses a desire to clarify the most significant thing to which he should devote his life. Kierkegaard speaks of a commitment, which constitutes his personal destiny (Berthold, 2013) (Bassham, 2015). This is not an intellectual or objective understanding, as exists in science, math, or logic. This truth is the meaning of life or even death. Kierkegaard asks himself what he should do. That is, he wonders how he should live in a practical way, not only in the world of thought. For him, purpose and action are intertwined.

Kierkegaard's philosophy is a multiplicity of paradoxes (Radu, 2012; Bond, 2016). The following is a summary of the paradox of "self." On the one hand, it is only when the "self" exists that there is freedom, that is, the "self" is the reason for freedom. On the other hand, the "self" is created through free activity prior to the "self." The question arises whether the "self" creates freedom, or is it created from the activity freedom that preceded it?:

"At the moment of choice, he is at the point of consummation, for his personality is consummating itself and yet at the same moment of choice he is at the very beginning because he is choosing himself according to his freedom," (Kierkegaard, S. (2013). Kierkegaard's Writings IV, Part II: Either/Or. Princeton University Press. P. 251).‏ Despite the paradoxes of Kierkegaard, the root of all his recommendations, is based on the assumption that A person’s existence begins with choice.

Finding meaning in life is a supreme goal, and not only a means to peace of mind and reducing existential pain. As noted in an article that relates to this issue: "But to 'become sick to some purpose,' 'to seek a way of life in which we may find meaning in the midst of our afflictions'" (Berthold, 2013). For Kierkegaard, a person's most important task is finding the purpose of his or her life and to actively live in light of this goal. That is, one should act to identify the goal and then take the required action to achieve it.

**Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980): Man, Purpose and Action**

In Sartre's view, a person is self-created through goal-directed actions. In the book "Existentialism is a Humanism," Sartre claims, "Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism" (Sartre, J. P., & Mairet, P. (1975). Existentialism is a Humanism (p. 396). New Haven: Yale University Press.‏ p. 3). Man is not created in advance, he becomes what he is (Baring, 2010). The first step of existentialism, according to Sartre, is to restore to Person the self-responsibility for his life and activity in reality.Ownership is related to self-responsibility. "Man is responsible for what he is" (ibid, p. 3). Sartre also emphasizes the value of commitment: "What counts is the total commitment" (p. 10). In his opinion, each person has a potential future, waiting to be created. A virgin future awaits the creation of man himself (Spademan, 1995). Life, for the existentialist, is related to action. The most obvious example is that there is no love outside the act of love., meaning that there is no possibility for love outside its realization. Similarly, there is no genius beyond that expressed in the creation of art. A person is a totally free creature in the absolute sense: "There is no determinism - man is free, man is freedom" (p. 6). Freedom, according to Sartre, is the foundation of all values (West, 2008). Sartre labels those who hide their full freedom from themselves, "cowards." Person must find himself in freedom, and recognize the basic fact that nothing can save him from himself. In Sartre's opinion, man is free to act in order to find his goals, to live them, and to be responsible for them.

**Lucius Annaeus Seneca (c. 4 BC – AD 65): Time management and life management**

Seneca is one of the practical philosophers. His advice is not limited to theoretical ideas and intellectualism (Maizeray & Janand, 2015), but relates mainly to practical questions, such as how one's life should be organized, and what character traits should be adopted, developed, and expressed in practice. He discusses how to relate to reality. One of Seneca's most significant recommendations for a good life, found in the book "On the Happy Life," is developing the proper attitude to time. This can cause a dramatic change in life. A proper attitude to time and planned and accurate use of this precious resource can change lives. According to Seneca, meaningful action in life requires a different attitude to the time given to human beings. In his opinion, laziness, going through life "asleep," and unwilling to leave one’s comfort zone are barriers to happiness; while action creates the potential to live a happy and meaningful life (Maizeray & Janand, 2015; Miller, 2010; Noe, 2016).

According to Seneca, many people remain never progress because they begin tasks but do not finish them. Seneca recommends completing tasks by a planned date. Thus, practical control over time can bring about a change in life. In *Moral* *[Letters to Lucilius](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Letters_to_Lucilius)*, (Trinacty, 2016) Seneca emphasizes that time is lost due to people’s disdain for it. Seneca teaches to manage time, and through it life, seriously. He advocates shifting from a situation of being a "slave of time" to the one of "working with time."

In his book "On the Shortness of Life," Seneca writes that people are chronically wasteful of time. “It is not that we have a short space of time, but that we waste much of it. Life is long enough, and it has been given in sufficiently generous measure to allow the accomplishment of the very greatest things if the whole of it is well invested," (Seneca, L. A. (2004). On the shortness of life (Vol. 1). Penguin UK ‏(p.1)”. The main problem is not the short human lifespan, but rather that most people mismanage their lives. They do not properly plan the time given to them and live as if their lives are endless. As a result, their lives slip away from them (Machek, 2018). According to Seneca, the most outstanding quality of a great person is not allowing time to pass without benefit. A great person takes advantage of every moment of life. In his opinion, life is worthy of living fully and actively (Kulikov, 2015) in every moment, and not with the passive expectation and false hope that life will somehow live itself.

For Seneca, the main point is to dedicate time to the right thing, which in his opinion, is wisdom. Only those who dedicate their time to wisdom are masters of their lives. These people overcome the time limits of their lives. They center their lives around knowledge rooted in the past, which exists within them and serves them, lives in the present actively and effectively, and creates a connection with the future. In other words, such people break free from the chains of the number of years decreed for them and embrace a larger span of time.

**Between philosophers and motivational mentors**

Brian Tracy has offered seminars for several decades, written dozens of books, and recorded hundreds of videos. John C. Maxwell is a writer, motivational speaker, and [pastor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pastor) who has written many books on self-help and leadership. He is world-renowned in teaching leadership and in May 2014 was named the number one leadership and management expert in the world by [Inc. Magazine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inc._Magazine) (["Top 50 Leadership and Management Experts"](http://www.inc.com/jeff-haden/the-top-50-leadership-and-management-experts-mon.html). Inc. Magazine. Retrieved May 10, 2014). These two motivational mentors can be said to broadly represent the spectrum motivational instruction, and for that reason examining their ideas can provide a solid basis for the comparison with philosophers.

In general, it can be said that the philosophers and motivational mentors whose ideas are examined here emphasize the present and the future more strongly than the past. They argue that where one came from is less important than where one is going. This attention to the present and future leads to activism, whereas the preoccupation with the past creates fatalism. Emphasis on the present and the future is based on an assumption of free choice, which means that it is possible to influence and change one’s life by taking responsibility, making commitments, and taking action. This approach is optimistic and indicates a belief in the possibility of change through action. It does not view what exists as a given, but offers a path for change through action.

Having meaning and purpose in life helps ease difficulties. Taking planned action towards goals, through effective self-management, enriches life and gives it meaning.

**"Goals" in Brian Tracy's books and YouTube videos**

Tracy defines the concept of "goals" in his books and lectures" Your ability to set goals is the master skill of success. Goals unlock your positive mind and release ideas and energy for goal attainment. Without goals, you simply drift and flow on the currents of life. With goals, you fly like an arrow, straight and true to your target" ( Tracy, 2003).

Success is first and foremost related to setting goals. Setting goals is the only way to control life rather than be controlled by it. "The great summary statement of all religions, philosophies, metaphysics, psychology and success is this: You become what you think about — most of the time" (Tracy, 2003). Goals for life are at the foundation of great human thought. The goals can be fulfilled creatively, even if they seem difficult to achieve at first. "These are some of greatest stimulants of all leaders to greater creativity...first decide on your goal or objective" (Tracy, Creativity 2014). Before doing so, one must define what the goals are. A creative solution (Tan, Tan, Mohd Hashim, Lee, Ong & Yaacob 2019). This is achieved through what Tracy calls “mindstorming” and describes as "…one of the most powerful ways ever discovered to creatively solve problems and achieve goals" (Tracy, 2014). When intricate goals are well defined, they can be solved creatively through brainstorming.

In Tracy’s video "Goal-Setting Advice" he outlines three tips: 1. focus on the big goal; 2. write your goals effectively; 3. structure your goals as questions ([https://youtu.be/VmihXD4HMNI)](https://youtu.be/VmihXD4HMNI)/). In his video "Brian Tracy's Top 10 Rules For Success," three out of ten recommendations relate directly to goals: find your life purpose (#3); structure your goals as questions (#5); never give up your dreams (#10) (<https://youtu.be/VCB3j438rNY>).

**Brian Tracy: Setting goals for correct action and managing time**

In many of the lectures that Tracy publicizes on YouTube, he concludes: "If you want to change the future, take action and take action now." It seems that Tracy believes that change and improvement depend on action; understanding is not enough. In order for the action to be successful, it must be directed towards a goal, with effective use of time. Tracy gives practical tools for time management (Niiya, 2018). Goals must be set in order of priority. "The starting point of time management is for you to determine your goals, and then to organize your goals by priority and value," (Tracy, 2003).

The triad of goals, time management, and action is clearly expressed in Tracy's words: "Time management begins with clarity. You take the time to sit down with a piece of paper and think through exactly what it is you want to accomplish in each area of your life" (Tracy, 2014). He adds: "The fifth question, and perhaps the best question in all of time management is this: What is the most valuable use of my time, right now?" (Tracy, 2014). Goal-setting and time management are embodied in action and these elements are interrelated and inseparable. Action should be taken immediately towards the goal: "Make a list of everything you can think of to do that will move you toward your goal. Take action on at least one thing immediately" (Tracy, 2003). Taking action creates an emotional connection to the goal and a commitment to it. Tracy also expresses the depth of connection between goals, time management, and action is in his book *Eat that Frog!,* in which he suggests a seven-step formula that can bring about significant change in people’s lives: "Decide exactly what you want; write it down; set a deadline for your goal; organize the list into a plan; take action on your plan immediately; resolve to do something every single day that moves you toward your major goal; build this activity into your daily schedule" (Tracy, 2007). These recommendations include the three elements of setting goals, organizing time, and taking action.

**Goals in John C. Maxwell's books and YouTube videos**

Tracy's emphasis is on personal development deeply integrated with economic development. Maxwell also deals with economic development, but he emphasizes personal development as a tool to build leadership and shape leaders. For Maxwell, a leader must operate at a higher level than what he or she is trying to teach others. "To give you an example, if your leadership rates an 8 then your effectiveness can never be greater than a 7," (Maxwell, 2007). In his book, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, he writes: "Follow them and people will follow you," (p. 1). Leaders cannot teach what they have not personally accomplished. A leader must have high personal standards, be an example to others, and allow growth and development among his followers. For Maxwell, a leader's influence must begin with defining what he or she wants to achieve: "Before you can persuade others on any issue you need to know just exactly what it is you want to accomplish…A goal is a dream with a deadline,'' (Maxwell, J. C. (2013). Be a people person: Effective leadership through effective relationships. David C Cook.‏ pp. 86-87). In order for a goal not to be a fantasy, a leader must set a clear timetable to achieve it. After building strong personal elements, a leader must direct others to realize their ideals and desires: ''Appealing to higher vision is simply helping others become not only what they are capable of becoming, but what really want to become,'' (p. 95).

Maxwell sees guiding people to find their purpose as a meaningful activity. In his opinion, a person should build on his or her own positive traits: "Whenever I mentor people and help them discover their purpose I always encourage them to start the process by discovering their strengths not exploring their shortcomings," (Maxwell, J. C. (2008). Leadership gold: Lessons I've learned from a lifetime of leading. HarperCollins Leadership p.59). In his opinion, setting a goal is the most significant factor in raising the level of life management. "Simply possessing a goal will put you in a higher league than most of your peers," (Maxwell, J. C. (2001). The power of leadership. David C Cook. ‏p.151).

Maxwell notes the connection between clarifying personal goals and strategic leadership: "Define your purpose. Devote some time to the strategic side of the leadership equation" (Maxwell, J. C. (2008). Leadership gold: Lessons I've learned from a lifetime of leading. HarperCollins Leadership.‏ p.182). In order to achieve a goal, a leader must delegate authority in a planned and logical manner, and encourage them to take action towards the stated goals and vision. "Every leader learns to stop merely taking action to fulfil the vision and start enlisting and empower others to take action," (pp. 99-100). In the video "DREAMS Are FREE, the JOURNEY Isn't!" Maxwell says "Find your passion" (<https://youtu.be/y16ks9CKkN0>). In the video "Make EVERY DAY Your MASTERPIECE!" Maxwell says "Don't live someone else's dreams" (<https://youtu.be/ntLjk8vELCA>), encouraging people to live out their personal passions and dreams.

**John C. Maxwell: Setting goals for correct action and managing time**

Maxwell notes that people cannot slow down or speed up the passage of time, but rather must act within its bounds. People can manage their use of time, and that depends on their will. Therefore, the term “time management" is an oxymoron. “Time cannot be managed…you can't manage your time so what can you do? Manage yourself! Nothing separates successful people from unsuccessful people like how they use their time. Successful people understand that time is the most important precious commodity on earth…they continually analyze how they are using their time and ask themselves the question 'Am I getting the best use out of my time?' Even though most people would acknowledge that time is finite, I think the majority of them don't really understand its value," (Maxwell, J. C. (2008). Leadership gold: Lessons I've learned from a lifetime of leading. HarperCollins Leadership.‏ p.115).

Effective leaders must be thrifty in how they spend time and act according to a plan: "As a leader you already have too little time. Now all you need is plan," (Maxwell, J. C. (2007). The 21 indispensable qualities of a leader: Becoming the person others will want to follow. HarperCollins Leadership.‏ p.128).

Maxwell believes that time is more valuable than money; lost money can be regained, but lost time will never return, so use of this resource must be carefully calculated. "But how you spend your time is more important than how you spend your money. Money mistakes can often be corrected, but when you lose time, it's gone forever. Your priority determines how you spend your time and time is precious. The following statement may help you to put time in perspective," (Maxwell, J. C. (2008). Today matters: 12 daily practices to guarantee tomorrow's success. Hachette UK.‏ chapter 4).

Maxwell also discusses "timing," by which he means setting a specific action for the most appropriate time: "You will find a pivotal moment when the right leader took the right action at the right time," (Maxwell, J. C. (2007). The 21 irrefutable laws of leadership: Follow them and people will follow you. HarperCollins Leadership.‏ (p.238). Maxwell sees value in striving to reach the final result. Action is not a value in itself, but exists when the action is directed at a goal. ''Motivation comes not by activity alone, but by the desire to reach the end result," (Maxwell, J. C. (1993). Developing the leader within you. Harper Collins.‏ p.123). A leader’s action causes positive activity within the environment. The leader's vital inspiration is a factor in taking action. The leader's actions are not limited to specific and limited effects, but rather create continuity and reactions that create a chain of actions. ''The action of the leader to multiplies in reaction because there are a number of followers,'' (Maxwell, J. C. (1993). Developing the leader within you. Harper Collins. ‏ (p. 106). Clear goals allow a leader the orientation to plan appropriate actions to empower others: ''A set of goals becomes a map a potential leader can follow in order to grow'' (Developing the leaders …p.93)

**Conclusion**

In this article, we have examined the connections between the ideas of philosophers and those of motivational mentors for achieving fulfillment and happiness in life. We show that the philosophers Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Seneca, and the motivational mentors Brian Tracy and John C. Maxwell adhere to similar basic principles: 1. setting goals; 2. proper use of time; 3. taking action. Planned action towards goals, through effective self-management, enriches life and gives it meaning. Meaning and efficiency receive their power from an almost-sacred relationship to the resource of time. Philosophers and mentors point out potential obstacles in life and how to deal with them. They offer a method for leading a meaningful life in this world, without basing their ideas and advice on God, or reward in the World to Come, and thus they differ from the exhortations regarding the true life and happiness found in various religions.

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