



# AN UNQUIET REVOLUTION AT THE WATER COOLER

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KAREN STOLPER

**RECENTLY LILITH BROUGHT TOGETHER A SMALL GROUP OF YOUNG WOMEN PROFESSIONALS WORKING FOR JEWISH NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS**—in education, the arts, community building, global betterment. Here's who: Tehilah Eisenstat, 31, Lisa Exler, 30, Elyssa Gaffin, 32, Amy Greenstein, 32, Rebecca Kahn, 27, Naomi Korb, 27, Jennifer Gottlieb\*, 25, Anna Marx, 27, and Mel Weiss, 24. We wanted to see why this brainy and well-educated bunch choose to work where they do, and to hear their worries about time, money and the prospects for getting to the top.

What's strikingly new in what they so candidly reveal is that this cadre of women isn't complaining and getting out. Instead, they want the Jewish workplace to get better. Unlike talented women before them who might simply have voted with their feet—leaving Jewish organizations to enter the business world, or striking out on their own, or backing out of the workforce altogether—the women gathered around the Lilith conference table articulated pretty clearly what they need in order to stay. Working where their values lie is what most of them want—but not at the cost of their home lives, their financial security, or their sense of self-worth. **LISTEN IN TO WHAT THEY'RE SAYING. AND TALK BACK AT LILITH.ORG.**

—SUSAN WEIDMAN SCHNEIDER

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**LILITH:** So you all work in Jewish nonprofit organizations. How'd that happen?

**NAOMI:** I don't think anyone was too shocked that I ended up in the Jewish world. I have always been Jewey McJew Jew. [Laughter.] Tried to get away from it, went to college. The Orthodox community at Hillel at the University of Maryland had never had any formal female leadership, and I stepped up and eventually became the first female president of the community...a stepping stone toward a fellowship at Hillel International. When the company I next worked for folded, within a week I heard from six different Jewish organizations asking how they could help and whether they could offer me a job.

\*A pseudonym

**TEHILAH:** I wouldn't have thought that I'd end up working in the Jewish world. I started out totally gung ho about writing, advertising, marketing, and meandered my way to Israel for a year, then came back and thought maybe I would meld marketing with my love for Israel, and that sort of led up into the Jewish communal world path.

Tomorrow I start working for Storahtelling. I am the new "Raising the Bar" program director. It's a bar-and bat-mitzvah program. [Laughter.] I was getting a Master's in midrash and a Master's in informal Jewish education and heard about this organization that does midrashic Jewish education and ended up doing volunteer consulting for them for some credits and found out that, lo and behold, there was funding for a position.



**ANNA:** I'm an intern at JESNA. My father very much wanted me to take over the family business, which is computer programming; I wasn't interested. My mom wanted me to be a teacher like her; I wasn't interested.

**ELYSSA:** I'm the senior program officer at Natan; it's a group of young philanthropists who pool their money and give to innovative Jewish causes. We're a two-women operation—me and my executive director. I got my current job, word of mouth, through the Jewish community. It's a small, small world.

Is this something that my family or friends would have predicted? I think they would have thought I would have a job with more money and higher status, to be honest with you. I think I am a real disappointment. [Laughter.]

**REBECCA:** I grew up a Schechter kid, K through 12, and Ramah camp through and through. I took college as a little bit of a hiatus from total Jewish involvement; I kind of went to college to meet non-Jews. I was 18 and didn't know any. I started as a campus coordinator for the Jewish National Fund, and it has been four years....

**LISA:** In both professional and other parts of my life, I'm totally involved in the Jewish community. I am one of the *gab-bais* [coordinators] of Hadar, a traditional egalitarian minyan on the Upper West Side, and that takes up all my time when I am not working.

**LILITH:** So this may be the moment to ask about work-life balance, and how you do it.

**TEHILAH:** Being married to an actor, I'm the first person to ask for family to come on to my insurance, and it blows my mind that I'm the first person in the organization to ever have

needed this. In some ways, we're still stuck in the notion that this work is either for really wealthy people who are passionate about something and want something to do in their spare time or wives who need something to do when they're not with their kids. There's been a lot of growth in the communal world and places for women; great, but it's just steady climbing. We're already there, thinking about families and having kids, so the acceleration needs to occur faster.

**ELYSSA:** I have a son who is almost 2, and I am pregnant again. Most of the time, Jewish organizations' missions espouse the importance of family life, or Jewish children, continuity and yet they're like, "and here's three weeks' maternity leave and we'll see you soon!"

**ANNA:** At JESNA, they are unbelievably flexible with their employees. Many people in the office work from home once a week or more. The majority of employees are women, and there are women at every tier. Work life balance? Well, that comes in with the flexibility. They demand a lot of their employees, but they also give back a lot in terms of time, reward, and praise. I love it and I want to stay forever.

**LISA:** I decided to leave my old job at about the time when I found out that I was pregnant, and thought seriously about staying, because I thought, well, I'm going to go to this new job, and should I tell them that I'm pregnant in the job search process? It was pretty agonizing, but it worked out fine. AJWS has a great policy—parental-leave, and it applies to men and women.

These policies are something that they're very conscious of, and of wanting to be the leader in Jewish non-profit world in those areas. They've expanded rapidly, and have all of these young women working there who've just started getting married, and they're anticipating all these kids in the next few years, and figuring out how they want to deal with that, so I felt like I was really a test case for that. Because so many things there are so great, I'm still looking for the one thing I don't have, which is childcare. I guess my soapbox is for the Jewish non-profit world to organize employer-sponsored childcare. I work in midtown, and there are five or six other Jewish non-profits in a five block radius, and I'd really like to see them come together and start a daycare together. That's one of the biggest concerns about how I'm going to stay in this job—what am I going to do with my daughter when I'm at work?

**ELYSSA:** Nothing's going to happen with this until fathers stand up and say, "We want a work/life balance," and that these issues are important to them, too. These things get talked about as women's issues, but they're not women's issues, they're parents' issues.

**LILITH:** Do you have anyone at work, maybe women who are a little ahead of you on the track, who help you deal with this? Change this?

**ANNA:** I think mentorship is key. Mentorship and recruitment. Part of recruitment is making the job attractive to enough that people want to come and want to stay. That's a big part of

recruiting—changing what the position looks like so that the top talent wants to come in.

**ELYSSA:** Related to recruiting new people—often women who have been working there for a long time just don't get considered, and they feel they're undervalued not just by salary but also because their experience is overlooked. There's a lot of knowledge you gain when you've worked someplace for several years. When these young women say they're leaving for a better-paying job, management lets them slip away, not even bothering to make them a counter-offer. A lot of relationships these employees cultivated for the organization are lost, and the next person has to start all over. It's not good for the organization, and for the individual who leaves—even to go to what seems like a better job—it can feel heart-wrenching. Young professional women are very invested in the work they do.

I used to go home and cry about work. I'm never going to do it again.

If you put all that heart and soul into it, there's no way it can give it back to you. Unfortunately I had to learn that the hard way. It doesn't mean that I'm working less hard, but I'm just giving less of my heart to it.

## **“JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS’ MISSIONS ESPOUSE THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY LIFE, OR JEWISH CHILDREN, CONTINUITY, AND YET THEY’RE LIKE, ‘HERE’S THREE WEEKS’ MATERNITY LEAVE AND WE’LL SEE YOU SOON!’”**

**JENNIFER:** The internal structure at my organization is nothing to be proud of: a lot of male executives, a lot of female assistants sitting outside of their offices, a lot of pay discrepancies between women and men, between Jews and non-Jews, between people of color and white executives.

**REBECCA:** One of things I've learned about being a manager is to make sure that everyone always feels valued. This is a non-profit salary, so people have to love what they are doing, and they have to know that you love what they are doing. How do you bring them to the next level even if you can't give them the benefits of the dollar?

**NAOMI:** I would welcome every entry-level professional into the field with a package: a mentor several years ahead in a related position; a listing of all the relevant professional conferences; information about the field, three jobs that might appeal to you in the future, etc.

**LILITH:** But mentoring alone might not do it. What about the money issue?

**LISA:** I'm actually feeling very passionate about my old job teaching day school. That is one area where they actually don't have the money to pay talented people to stay.

**MEL:** I was at a lecture and an older woman came up to me

and I introduced myself and she said “Very nice to meet you. How much do you make?” She explained she had been talking to the young women in her office and they were really upset that they weren't making enough to pay their rent. But there were no circumstances under which I was going to tell her how much I make—

**ELYSSA:** Why?

**MEL:** Because I didn't know her and it was an uncomfortable moment and I didn't know who she was. But that was an interesting moment. Another spark for our conversation tonight was when I went to a public event with a friend who works at a Jewish non-profit. She knew a lot of people there, not from her professional life—but from her night job as a restaurant hostess—her second job that was necessary for her to live.

**TEHILAH:** About sharing salary information...I was working at a place for several years and I guess I still had the Israeli mentality that you can speak about money. Americans don't speak about money, but Israelis do. What are you paying for rent? How much did you pay for that dress? Not a problem.

Somebody had wanted to join the organization that I was working for and she asked me what I got paid, and I told her.

I got a call later that evening, saying that I should have been fired for what I did, that I had no right right to tell her, because they wanted to pay her less than a babysitter. We're working for Jewish organizations so I thought they valued honesty and *emet*

and all of that crazy stuff. They were so good about so much else, and on this they threw me for a loop. I spoke to my friends who were further along in their careers and they all said I was an idiot, that you should never tell people how much you're making!

**ELYSSA:** I make \$10,000 more per year now than I did in my first job, seven years ago, even though now I have my master's degree. When I switched to my new job I wanted more money and they gave me a hard time about it. They told me in a year we'll look over it again and have a conversation we'll see what happens when that year is up—cause by then you might be stuck, you might have another kid. I'm the person who does talk about money. If we don't talk about it how do you know that what you earn is right, or enough?

First of all, in the non-profit world, on your 990s you're supposed to list people's salaries, just the top five people—so at least you know. I talked about work/life balance, but several years from now I want to be a big shot rolling in the cash, and I want to be earning \$200,000 a year which is really hard for me to imagine, and that's sad.

**ANONYMOUS\*:** In my first job, I was working there for a while and then there was a promotion opportunity. I was preparing for hours to have this conversation with my really difficult boss at the time. I talked to a lot of people so I could find out what they were making—and it was really good that I did,

\*For obvious reasons, some of these observations were off the record.



because he lied to me about what people were making. It was ugly, but people take for granted that that's not spoken about so they take advantage of it.

**TEHILAH:** I'm realizing that by officially committing to work in the Jewish world I'm giving up any monetary marks of success, but it's something that I hope will help me change the world for the better.

I thought after getting two masters degree I wouldn't have any problem with salary—I'd just be looking for the perfect job. I got out of JTS with two degrees and my choices were get paid \$20,000 less than I got the year before I left, and work nights

**“IN MY OPINION, IN A SOCIAL JUSTICE ORGANIZATION NOBODY SHOULD BE MAKING THAT MUCH MONEY.”**

and weekends, or take jobs that were higher up the totem pole and less engaging for me. That's the conundrum of staying in the Jewish world; the stuff that I find exciting is considered the straight-out-of-college, high-energy, program side where I'm never going to make any money. I don't want to move into the development portion of things, but how do I stay here?

**JENNIFER:** I negotiated my salary up only because I spoke to another disgruntled employee who left who said, whatever they offer you ask for more; they have it. If they want you, they'll give it to you. Play hardball and they'll play back. What bothers me more than the low entry-level salaries is the disparity, knowing how much the senior executives make and hearing that they offered the new administrative assistant an embarrassingly low salary and told her they didn't have more in the budget to give her.

In my opinion, a social justice organization shouldn't have

that kind of disparity, and nobody should be making that much money in that kind of organization. I may be going against what a lot of you have said, but for me, Jewish Day School is not a priority, living on the Upper West Side is not a priority. I don't understand such high salaries in a social justice organization where we talk about raising money to do projects for low-income people.

**ELYSSA:** But the reality at the end of the day is that you're still running a business—non-profit or not—and you're going to try to get people for as cheap as you can. That's just what it is, if they're going to further what their mission is and at the end of the day help a lot of people. You can't expect people to work really hard and to get the kind of top talent unless you're willing to pay them. It's this whole idea that this is a non-profit, it's for the mission, so nobody should get paid. No, that's totally self-defeating. We have to insist on being paid what we're worth. Good people create success and they should be paid for it.

**REBECCA:** I also think men are much more aggressive where for us salary becomes slightly more emotional; I don't know why that is. When we're talking about numbers how is that emotional? But it is.

**ANONYMOUS:** I did negotiate but it was for so little. They really couldn't say we don't have that much in our budget because I know how much they've allotted for my programs. I see where I could find that money! [Laughter.] It's sad to me that that's the mentality. They know that we're here because we're committed to something.

**NAOMI:** Your pay should measure your performance and not how good you are at arguing for your salary. I'm not a highly aggressive person and I shouldn't earn a lower salary as a result.

**ELYSSA:** I ended up negotiating for better maternity leave. I said, “Our policies need to reflect our mission” And lo and behold, they came back to me with a much better deal which basically ended up with me with 10 weeks of paid maternity leave. Obviously I was very glad that I said something; always say something. All our organizations would go a lot further if they

truly embraced the Jewish values in how they ran the organization and asked themselves, what are we reflecting here?

**LISA:** I feel like something needs to happen in the community where every woman in an organization is empowered to walk in there and ask for what is the right thing, what she needs and what will make it possible for her to stay there in a comfortable way.

**AMY:** My jobs have been really dynamic and there are so many exciting and meaningful projects that I get to be a part of. At the same, sometimes I find myself fighting against falling into a pattern of creating unrealistic expectations for the people I manage, because I'm not always sure what is realistic when the bar is set so high for me and those around me. I think this stems from the fact that we care so much about what we do that it's sometimes hard to know when to say when.

**ELYSSA:** But at the same time, you feel like, am I asking too much? Here I am asking to work one day from home, two days from home, and here I am asking for \$10,000 more than I was making at my old job, but then again I have a Master's now and I didn't at my old job—it's hard. And I think women in the Jewish community suffer from the same thing that all women do, which is that it's hard for us to stand up and say, yeah, I'm worth it. I can do as much in four days as other people do in five and do it twice as well. Even though we're of this other generation, it's still difficult for me to puff up my chest and say I'm worth it. And, I don't feel like I'm hearing, "You're worth it!" I feel like in the for-profit world, you hear that more. There's this huge misconception that because this is the non-profit world, people shouldn't be making money. I'm going to go where they give me a good deal. If it's in the Jewish community, fantastic—I like helping the Jews, and I've given them a good part of my life for the last five-and-a-half years—and if it's somebody else, well, the Jews are going to lose out. And unfortunately, I feel like Jews really are losing out in a lot of places, because there's a real lack of trying to make it work for people who don't want to do the regular nine-to-seven.

**ANONYMOUS:** On the salary point, I don't know in my office if it's such a gender thing. I think there's a philosophy of get them while they're young, get a lot out of them, because they don't really know any better, and they're going to leave after a few years anyway, because they want to make more money. But this is what we need them for. So I don't think that's a gender thing, I think it's a philosophy about what to do with these energetic, optimistic, we-can-save-the-world, we-can-save-the-Jewish-people, right-out-of-college people.

**ANNA:** At the same time, even if it's not a conscious gender thing, I think that to young men who are coming out of school and looking for a career, it's a real turn off, the idea that this pays no money and works you to death and there's no status.

**ELYSSA:** One of my big pet peeves is Jewish organizations are populated with talented Jewish women and yet at the top of the organization there are men.

**ANNA:** We've spoken about men at the top tier, but what

## HOW YOU CAN MAKE CHANGE

by SHIFRA BRONZNICK AND DIDI GOLDENBAR

*As this eloquent discussion demonstrates, the challenges faced by women professionals in the Jewish workplace are both practical and profound. We believe that you can contribute to gender equity and positive change, no matter where you sit in your organization:*

**1) ACKNOWLEDGE THE IMPORTANCE OF GENDER EQUITY.** The health of the Jewish community depends on retaining talented women professionals. While gender bias persists in most Jewish organizations, these young women praise the agencies that recognize the link between enlightened human resource policies and high performance standards. Take note of best practices and urge your organization to replicate them.

**2) CLOSE THE GAP BETWEEN JEWISH VALUES AND JEWISH PRACTICE.** Jewish organizations can align their espoused values with their policies by supporting flexibility, parental leave, job sharing and affordable daycare.

**3) INTEGRATE CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND GENDER EQUITY.** In other sectors, mentoring and sequenced career programs have helped women advance to leadership. Jewish organizations lag behind the curve, and given other gender-based obstacles, this affects women disproportionately. How can your organization promote career development?

**4) BREAK THE TABOO AROUND MONEY.** Advocating for greater transparency around salary structures will compel organizations to rethink their assumptions about how professionals are compensated, especially along gender lines.

**5) PRACTICE NEGOTIATION SKILLS.** Negotiation can be more challenging for women, especially where we are mission-driven and expected to set our own needs aside. Fair pay based on merit should become a norm. Negotiation is a process: find out what your job is worth, prepare your presentation and practice with a confidante.

**6) BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND ALLIANCES.** Advancing gender equity can begin in your living room, the local coffee-house, or the conference room. But deep organizational change is difficult: threatening the status quo is likely to meet with resistance. Don't go it alone. Build relationships and cultivate allies—across generations and across the professional-volunteer divide—to build a Jewish community where women and men share leadership.

*Bronznick and Goldenbar are co-authors, with Marty Linsky, of Leveling the Playing Field: Advancing Women in Jewish Organizational Life. For more on the book, and for other resources from Bronznick's groundbreaking work at Advancing Women Professionals and the Jewish Community, go to [www.advancingwomen.org](http://www.advancingwomen.org)*

we sort of brushed past is that there are no men at the bottom tier. That's really problematic. I think diversity benefits everybody everywhere you go.

**ELYSSA:** I think that men are seen as more of a rare commodity—especially young men, because as you can see, there aren't a lot of young men. There are a lot of older men, so I don't know where the young men are, exactly, but they're not working their way up the ranks. They're coming in from the outside.

### **DATING AND OTHER LIFE CHOICES**

**ANONYMOUS:** I'm not married. But when I'm dating, unfortunately salary is something I have to think about, because I want my kids to go to a day school, I want them to go to camp, and I don't want it to be an issue every time we want to do something Jewish, which tends to cost a lot of money. And I feel shallow that this has to be part of my thinking when I meet someone, but otherwise I have to reconsider my career. I don't think that a person in my profession can marry somebody else in my profession, if they want to give their child the kind of lifestyle I had growing up.

**ELYSSA:** My real passion is in international development, and I would have really loved to pursue that, but you have to spend a ton of time in the field, and out of all the women I knew in international development, none had children and only a handful were married. And I decided I wanted to have a family, which I didn't tell the guy I was dating at the time, because that might have frightened him a little bit, but we got married and we have a family. For me, the priority right now is for a good work/life balance, so where I'm going to be in five years is wherever offers me an opportunity to have that. That's, to me, what's most important.

I know I'm very lucky to have a husband who makes more than three times what I do. I certainly couldn't have married a man who works in the Jewish community, because we wouldn't be able to afford to live in New York and have a family. I don't know how people do it, to be honest with you. If, for example, my husband had some kind of crisis of conscience and decided he wanted to save the world, I'd be up a creek.

**TEHILAH:** I married an actor, which is sort of like marrying someone in the non-profit world. So you're thinking, what are we going to do when we have kids? Since we're not bankers and lawyers we have the kind of flexibility you want with kids, but we can't afford to have kids attend day school, which is a huge point of contention cause we both grew up going to Jewish day schools. Either you invest yourself or your kids in Judaism. That's the choice.

**ELYSSA:** That reminds me of another problem I have—I work in the Jewish community, but I don't think I'd be able to afford to send my child to Jewish day school. And I hope to have multiple children—more than two, even—and I'd like to be able to send them all to summer camp. And if we can't take care of our own—well, what kind of message does that send? It's cost-prohibitive right now to work for the community and pay for

your child to be a part of it.

**JENNIFER:** There's been a lot of talk about Jewish continuity and babies and marriage. For your demographic purposes...I'm queer, and that doesn't really speak to me. I'm queer and the issues that affect the queer Jewish community are invisible in this space.

I feel like there are all these other issues that I deal with as a queer person. When I think about dating I can't think about just salary issues. For instance, for transgender people there are real worries—all the time—about whether they'll even be able to get a job at all. So I feel there is a whole other group of issues not being addressed here.

**MEL:** Being out at work is a huge deal for people. What do you do if you are in a Jewish organization?

**JENNIFER:** The truth is I would never interview at an organization where I would hesitate about coming out at my interview. I wouldn't be interested in working for an organization like that, I am pretty sure.

### **THE JEWISH SOAPBOX**

**AMY:** I grew up in Long Island in a very affluent Jewish town. My family lived on the wrong side of the tracks. I didn't grow up going on vacation all the time and I didn't get a car when I was 16. I don't know if this plays out for other people; I do think it's connected to the fact that when I was thinking about what kind of career I wanted, I never thought about salary. Placing a lot of importance on money was too loaded for me. Once I'm in my job, I'm thinking about it.

**“I WANT MORE JEWISH VALUES IN OUR JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS—ACROSS THE BOARD, FROM WHAT TOILET PAPER WE BUY TO INSURANCE AND HIRING PRACTICES.”**

When I went to my ten-year high school reunion I looked on the list that said where people worked, and out of a hundred people on the list three of us were working in non-profit. Everyone else was lawyers, bankers or any other stereotypes for Jews you can think of.

**TEHILAH:** My main soapbox is we're working for Jewish organizations and Jewish values get discarded when it comes to money. I want more Jewish values in our Jewish organizations across the board, from what toilet paper we buy to the insurance and hiring policies. We have great missions and great people and I just want the Jewish values to be woven in all the way through.

### **WHERE'S THE MIDDLE GENERATION?**

**REBECCA:** I think it's interesting, you know—I look around my office, and I'm starting get near the older end. There's just this huge gap between the 20s and the 40s, and there are very

few people—men or women—in their 30s in my organization. Some are leaving for motherhood or for their husbands, and some are leaving for the for-profit sector or to go back to grad school, but there is a real lack of people in their late 20s and 30s. I don't know where I'll be in five years, because there's almost no one in my office in their 30s.

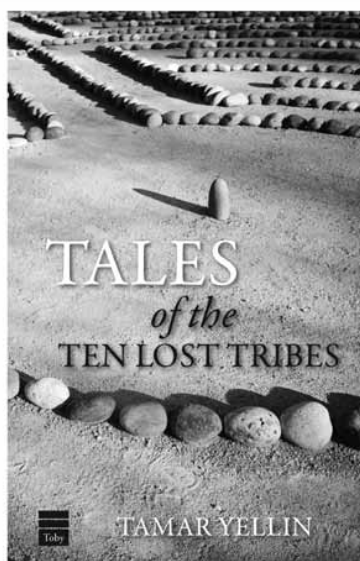
**“RIGHT NOW, YOU CAN'T WORK IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY AND AFFORD TO PAY FOR YOUR CHILD TO BE A PART OF IT.”**

**MEL:** If you want to be part of a big Jewish community you're going to have to live in an urban area and you're probably going to have to pay a lot more for your rent or your mortgage than if you were living in the rest of the country. But what do you do when the Upper West Side is one of the most expensive neighborhoods in New York City, or in the country? How much of this are you willing to accept as “this is where the jobs are, so this is where I'm going to live” versus this is ridiculous. Is living where all the Jews are a value or a problem?

**TEHILAH:** If once you reach those higher twenties and thirties, you're going to leave the organization, you won't be able to give all of your information to the person after you. What is that saying? To me that says that their programming isn't the most important stuff going on there—but that's not what the organization would say out loud.

**ANNA:** I've seen the other side to this story. Organizations that believe in hiring top talent. And it's seen as a catastrophe when someone good leaves.

**NAOMI:** You know, when you enter this field—sometimes through a fluke, because your first entry level job out of college is with your youth group in your hometown—you're not looking at it as a career path and envisioning where can you go from there, whereas people who jump into investment banking have that ladder laid out for them. The Master's programs in our field are beginning to lay out the trajectory, but we're still behind. And we still don't talk the talk. We don't work to 'sell' Jewish communal work. We don't regard it highly enough and we don't promote the field as a professional industry. There's a lot of apologetic rhetoric around it, like “Well, it's a really flexible lifestyle, and we enjoy it,” rather than showing pride in the Godly work we do and the brilliant and talented colleagues with whom we're lucky to work. ■



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