

Episode 5- Developing Discrepancy

Amy and Paul are talking about developing discrepancies in this episode

Amy Shanahan: CASAT Podcast Network in this episode, Amy and Paul are talking about developing discrepancies. They'll discuss the importance of a person being aware of their ambivalence in regards to their change goals, strategies for talking about discrepancies, how MI is not about persuading people, and so much more. For episode resources, contact us and other info, visit the lions and Tigers and bears MI website at nfartec.org/mipodcast that's nfartec.org/mipodcast

Paul Warren: Lions and tigers and Bears. MI an interactive podcast focused on the evidence based practice of motivational interviewing, a method of communication that guides toward behavior change while honoring autonomy.

Amy Shanahan: I'm Amy Shanahan.

Paul Warren: And I'm Paul Warren.

Amy Shanahan: And we've worked together over the past ten years. We've been facilitating Mi learning collaboratives and providing trainings and coaching sessions focused on the adoption and refinement of MI We're also members of the motivational interviewing network of trainers. Join us in this adventure into the forest, where we explore and get curious about what lies behind the curtain of mi.

Paul Warren: Hello, Amy.

Amy Shanahan: Hello, Paul.

Paul Warren: Very happy to be here with you for episode five of developing discrepancy. Discrepancy, yes. Of our podcast. Yes.

Developing discrepancy is when someone veers away from their goal

Amy Shanahan: All right, so what do you think about that? I guess we should first talk about what is that? I remember one of our first training slides when we started to build our materials together about ten or eleven years ago. We had a visual, two circles on a page that showed, where the person is and where they want to be. And how do we help guide them to getting closer to where they want to be? And I wonder if that relates to the definition of developing discrepancy. How do we get to that point of when someone starts to veer away from their goal or moving forward with where they want to be?

Paul Warren: It's interesting because I've also thought of developing discrepancy as a useful strategy.

Paul Warren: When working with folks who are more in pre contemplation than contemplation, where they're engaging in a particular behavior and maybe experiencing consequences of that behavior, and also see no need at that moment to actually, take any action to change their behavior and developing discrepancy. You know, it's interesting. I really appreciate that you started with a visual because, you know, when you describe those two circles where the person is and where the person wants to be in

the area kind of between them and the discrepancy speaks to that. There's a difference between where the person is and where they actually want to be and am. I creates the opportunity. And I like that. It's called developing discrepancy, in the sense that it's developing the discrepancy, making it conscious and overt so that the person is more in touch with their ambivalence, about the change that they're considering. So you're really helping the person to achieve maybe a slightly more intense way of experiencing their ambivalence.

Amy Shanahan: It was really helpful to think of it in the terms of where in the stages of change someone is. Right. And, I I'm curious about that too, as I think about things that I've considered when I'm talking with someone about, well, I'm, saying this, I want to make this change. At the same time, I'm not doing it or what I value. That's one thing that stands out to me as well. When people have a value, like, I really don't want to hurt my kids, and then at the same time, their behaviors are showing something else.

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Amy Shanahan: So how do you have that conversation with somebody? maybe they're not aware of it as well. So I never thought about that, that it was really that sense of awareness or lack of awareness. And how do you raise that up? in a compassionate way, with the spirit, of course.

Paul Warren: Yes, absolutely.

When developing discrepancy, intentionally choosing to do that creates discomfort or anxiety

And, you know, I don't know if you have this association with this, strategy of developing discrepancy. I recall, and I can't remember where it was, but I recall being in a training or listening to somebody talk about developing discrepancy within the context of, mi. And one of the things that really stood out to me about what they were saying was, is that when developing discrepancy, intentionally choosing to do that, on some level, you're creating a degree of discomfort or anxiety for the person.

Paul Warren: So you ultimately, which is interesting, because it's probably parallel to the discomfort or anxiety that somebody experiences when they're ambivalent about the behavior change, because sometimes they may experience discomfort or anxiety. When intentionally developing discrepancy, the kind of flag that went up for me is I want to be attuned to doing it in a way that it develops the discrepancy, makes it obvious, and doesn't do that in such an intense way that the person becomes immobilized.

Amy Shanahan: It's interesting that you say that, because when you were talking about that level of anxiety, and I was imagining myself going, wow, if all, helped me see this discrepancy, I felt that level almost as if my writing reflex kicked in and I thought, wow. Yeah. It probably would cause even me as the worker to think I have to really tread with, and I don't want to say lightly, I want to say tread with compassion and empathy and understanding that that could indeed kick in for somebody when I'm sitting across them. What do you think about that? And this whole notion of the spirit and how we use this strategy at the same time with kindness and love and compassion.

Paul Warren: You know, it's funny because an example keeps coming into my head, which is ice cream. And what I mean by that is that, let's say my stated goal is to lose five pounds.

Paul Warren: And every other day I go to a local ice cream place called the dugout and I get a soft serve vanilla with the chocolate coat.

Amy Shanahan: Is that a real place, the dugout?

Paul Warren: It is, it is. And there's a discrepancy between the goal I'm stating I want to achieve, And the behaviors I'm currently engaging in. So it makes me think if I was speaking to me or you were speaking to me and you wanted to develop discrepancy using, that behavior and my goal, how would you do that? And that I always think of a double sided reflection.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah. Well, and I was thinking of a, curious question as well, depending on what my relationship is with you and if I weren't engaged, because I was thinking a lot of things, I could say, gee, Paul, do you think that the ice cream is getting in the way of you achieving your goal? That wouldn't be very nice.

Paul Warren: Right. And it would be a closed question and I would probably say yes or no. And it's, it's, I mean, and we were talking about confrontation right prior to starting our recording. And I'm wondering if that might be a great example of like, a confrontational statement.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah.

Paul Warren: Which is not the same thing. It's, it's not the same thing as developing discrepancy. It's very different.

Amy Shanahan: Right, right. And the same thing with persuasion and developing

discrepancy.

Amy Shanahan: So, hey Paul, do you think it might be something to consider? That's a close question, but I'm not intentionally using motivational interviewing, but just thinking about how you have to really strategize what you're going to say to somebody when you see this obvious discrepancy in front of you because you don't want to give it to them, you want to explore it with them.

Paul Warren: Yeah. And you had mentioned

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Paul Warren: spirit and you had mentioned, you were saying earlier about how this needs to be done with compassion and with empathy and in a semi spirited way. And that in many ways, comes down to, like you were saying, the engagement, the relationship you have with the person and the tone of voice you're using.

Amy Shanahan: Right.

Paul Warren: Because I could imagine you might, because we know each other and we have a, long time relationship as friends and colleagues, I could imagine you might be able to say to me in an am I spirited way? Something to the effect of, you know, you mentioned to me that you go to the dugout twice. I mean, every other day. And you've also said that, your goal is to lose five pounds.

Amy Shanahan: Right.

Paul Warren: And notice how when I said your goal is to lose five pounds, I just stopped, paused. Right. Because then I'm sitting with those two things next to each other, and I might feel a certain degree of discomfort.

Amy Shanahan: Right. Not because I said it.

Paul Warren: Well, because, yes, because you said it and because I heard it. And it's not you making me feel the discomfort, it's the two things put next to each other that create the discomfort. And I could imagine maybe after a pause, you might say, what are your thoughts about that? Or what do you make of that?

Amy Shanahan: And I hear a lot of people when I'm giving them feedback about their tone and what they say and to whom. And that whole sense of, intentionality and thinking about the relationship and the skill and the strategy, which is sometimes why we say am I is deceptively simple. People will say to me, oh, my. But I really cared about Paul. I didn't intend to hurt his feelings. I was just pointing out the two different things. And there are really subtle and important ways to make it stronger from an mi perspective.

Paul Warren: Absolutely. And, you know, you said something that really, turned a light bulb on for me, which is you said, pointing out something. And I think the thing with developing discrepancy is the intention is not to point out, the intention is to set next to each other and invite the person to comment or react on the two things that are being set next to each other. And that's very different than pointing something out.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah. And, you know, now I have a light bulb.

Paul Warren: What's that going?

Amy Shanahan: Well, that, I'm very curious, and I never used to be curious about words. I used to say, oh, words, words. I just used a different word. And, you know, I would defend my stance and words really matter, and pointing out is one of them. And this habit of language, and those were my words. I chose those words. And, I'm glad you pointed them out. They could be so powerful and you don't even realize how they can change the meaning or the connection or the level of compassion that you intended to provide.

Amy Shanahan: By what you say.

Paul Warren: And you know, the idea that, like, you know, I'm an authority, therefore I'm pointing this out to you as somebody whom I'm providing services to, and that is not, am I spirited?

Amy Shanahan: And the same thing with get somebody to do it or get somebody to see it leans into persuasion, sometimes, if nothing, confrontation, depending on how it's said.

Paul Warren: Yeah. And you know, it's interesting because the idea of confrontation, confrontation, persuasion is maybe pointing it out. Confrontation is, look at this.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah.

Paul Warren: To me that's confrontation.

Paul Warren: And you know, again, I know you didn't want to use the phrase I tread lightly or lightly treading, because we can, in an AmI spirited, am I congruent way, use the strategy of developing discrepancy to help the person to work out which way they really want to go. And the whole idea that

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Paul Warren: it does create a certain degree of discomfort. But again, the beauty of it is if you're not quote unquote pointing it out at them, you're with them in their moment of discomfort.

Paul Warren: Because you have that relationship.

Using double sided reflections can help you guide people toward behavioral change

Amy Shanahan: Yeah. You mentioned that you like to use double sided reflections, which would be a really keen tool, just like we use when we want to mirror and show both sides of the ambivalence.

Amy Shanahan: So in a similar way.

Amy Shanahan: It's putting it on the table that you may not have said these very things right now in this moment. At the same time, we've been working together and you mentioned that your goal is to lose five pounds. And you've also mentioned going to the dugout every other day.

Amy Shanahan: The other day you said it. Maybe not this day you said it. So there could be a gap in that conversation. And a double sided reflection, again, has that intentionality of showing that there's two things here on the table. What do you think about them?

Paul Warren: That's right. That's right. Which is different than look at this.

Amy Shanahan: Right. Yeah. I'm curious about this. Do you see it and what do you think about it?

Paul Warren: Right, right. And I'm, and I'm genuinely interested in what you think about it. I'm not just pretending to be interested in it because, you know, I'm telling you, this is what you should be looking at. And, you know, in terms of intentionality, too, developing discrepancy is not about a gotcha moment.

Amy Shanahan: Right.

Paul Warren: You know, it's not like, well, you know, you said you want to do this and you're doing this. See, it's not a gotcha moment.

Amy Shanahan: That's really helpful because I think it feels that way. Like, hey, which is probably where I had a little level of anger. And I don't know if other listeners have that when you're talking with someone is like, well, I'm in my head and should I say this or should I be careful, I don't want to increase their anxiety? Or is it that I have an agenda? Right. Do I have an agenda to get you, or am I nervous about raising some level of angst in the conversation with you? So it's being mindful of what my intentions are as a practitioner.

Paul Warren: Yes.

Amy Shanahan: And using motivational interviewing with the spirit.

Paul Warren: Yes. And you know, just to be very clear about that, using an MI with the spirit is an agenda. And that's not a bad thing. It's an agenda guiding toward the behavioral change.

Paul Warren: And you can guide toward something without a gotcha, and without the confrontation. Look at this. And you can still guide toward the change. And I think that some folks shy away from the necessity of guiding an MI conversation because they're afraid that they're going to act out the sort of gotcha, I'm an expert and this is what you need to do. Kind of writing reflex, asserting authority, kind of cards.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah. And I would think that I would want to avoid it for the sake of not coming across as persuasive or confrontational. And yet it could be a, quite powerful task or skill to, to present, to help the person. Take a look at what you heard and see you're not making it up, you're not adding meaning or something different to the story. And I wonder what you think about this because I was putting myself in your shoes and also putting myself back in my own shoes about wanting to lose five pounds and going to the dugout every other day. I know that I have changed my behaviors in different ways at different times. So today I'm not going to the dugout and I'm, eating healthier. And tomorrow I want to go to the dugout. And then the next day I want to do something different. And I may choose that the dugout's not the important thing, it's the other things I want to do differently. And the dugout going to have soft serve ice cream might not be my.

Paul Warren: Issue, truly and you know, it's possible to achieve your goal with some soft serve ice cream too.

Paul Warren: Because there may be other actions that you're taking. So I think it's important to not get too invested in, in the idea.

Some people are surprised that Mi is not about persuading people

And you know, you've said persuasion

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several times and I'm so glad you keep saying that because I think some people, this is just my personal bias or, experience. I think some people are really surprised when they find out that Mi is not about persuading people.

Amy Shanahan: Right. A nicer way to say tricking people into something.

Paul Warren: Yes. I think people are really surprised at that sometimes. Like, wait a minute, I thought that's what Mi was for.

Amy Shanahan: Well, and I worked with someone. I might have told this story in other episodes. This one woman really struggled with persuasion and we would talk a lot about it. It was really fun to work with her because she was so curious to learn and she really felt that her, and her heart was in it and her heart was deep in it. And her use of persuasion was strong because she was so entrenched in wanting to help people

change.

Amy Shanahan: And she realized that she could be a little bit more, or a lot a bit more effective using other tools and strategies and not being persuasive. Anyway, I think because she had this strong sense that her heart was in it to help people change, that she didn't think it was persuasive.

Paul Warren: Mm Yeah. Because she was doing good.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah. And it took her a while to. She would listen to her, she would listen to feedback and she would try hard not to, but it was such a habit for her.

Amy Shanahan: It was a style of how she worked with people that it took her a little bit longer. Ah. To understand it for herself, that she could try other things on to see how they worked with people and how.

Paul Warren: They worked for her too, probably.

Amy Shanahan: Mm Exactly right. It was just such a powerful thing for her that she did it all the time without even. I guess in a sense, if you talk about developing discrepancies, she wasn't aware really that persuasion was a strategy that she used a lot and that it could be more effective. so it took a while for her to explore other things, to see how they worked with her, with another person.

Paul Warren: Yeah, yeah. And you know, this idea that, people get into this work for so many different reasons, you know, some people come to the work with extraordinary lived experience and extraordinary educational experiences and you, know, formal

experiences, informal experiences, and, you know, most people do want to help and the wonderful thing, I think, about motivational interviewing is that it's a method of helping that guides the person to actually help themselves. So your role is really to guide them toward their own resources, their own motivations, to explore their own ambivalence, not to persuade them to do something that you as the professional think they should do.

Amy Shanahan: Right. And we know that some may do it and not necessarily over the long haul and not intrinsically.

Amy Shanahan: Right. And I'm always curious about that coming from the background of predominantly substance use disorder treatment and working with people in the beginning. I get this a lot when people come to mi trainings and they'll say, well, what do you do when someone comes time and time again? And I don't want to be on probation and the judge sent me here and, it's not my marijuana use, it's not my problem. That's not my problem. They're my problem. To me, that's an example of how can you bring to the table, put on the table that discrepancy of, you want to be off of probation, and yet the judge keeps sending you here. And people talk about that when they work with people in the justice related services.

Paul Warren: Yeah. And it's not easy work. And I would imagine if there's an internal pressure and an external pressure to get the person to change, quote unquote.

Paul Warren: Because you think that's your job internally and externally, I could see that the stakes would be high and there would be a lot of dissatisfaction, perhaps frustration, disappointment, when people are just simply moving through their own kind of process.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah.

Paul Warren: And, you know, in some ways, the, I think the intent of

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Paul Warren: developing discrepancy is in a supportive, open way, helping somebody to look at this is going on and this is going on. And what are your thoughts about that?

Amy Shanahan: What do you make of that?

Paul Warren: Right. And that's the intervention.

Amy Shanahan: So that was a double sided reflection followed by an open question.

When developing discrepancies, it's critical to be specific m

What other skills or strategies have you used or have you heard other people use when developing discrepancies?

Paul Warren: You alluded to one of them, which I think is critical with any kind of counseling you may be doing, whether it's m i m or anything else, is the depth of listening in the sense that if we're listening with our eyes, ears, heart and our gut, we're going to hear what's important to this person. M and we're also going to hear the things that they may currently be doing and how they actually feel about those things and what their thoughts really are about. Those things. So when developing discrepancy, it's

critical to be specific m as opposed to making general statements. And, and the best way to be specific is to have a deep, informed understanding of this person's experience. So how these elements, these disparate elements, kind of what it's like for them to be on the table at the same time.

Amy Shanahan: That's really helpful. Paul.

Developing discrepancy requires the ability to be absolutely non judgmental

The description of the intuition, the gut, the heart, the ears, listening with all your senses, not just your intuition, all your senses. And leaning in to listen to understand it made me think of people, want to know, and I was curious. I thought you were going to share a skill or tool. And yet it's not always that easy to say, this is the recipe for how you do it. It's too complex. It's a little bit more complex. Like you said, you and I know each other, and if I said what I said to put it on the table, I might get away with it a little bit better. And at the same time, I have an opportunity to use with you motivational interviewing as well, and not be persuasive because we know each other better anyway. It's a little bit more complex than just, this is the skill and this is the strategy you use to develop discrepancy. It's timing, it's intentionality, it's how is the person feeling? How important is it to them? What is the discrepancy about? Is it a value that's important to them? Your kids are really important to you and you don't want to hurt them any longer.

Paul Warren: Yeah. And you know, you've mentioned a couple of times the idea of the relationship that the person has. I don't know how many people, I've listened to their

recordings and heard a lot of persuasion and even heard confrontation and you know, in discussing it with them, again, sort of saying using developing discrepancy during that supervisory discussion. And they have often said, well, oh, you know, I've been seeing this client for x number of years, so I have the kind of relationship with them that I can say that.

Paul Warren: So I mean, what a wonderful thing to be able to talk about with a supervisee, especially through the lens of motivational interviewing.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah, right. It doesn't, it shouldn't matter how long you've been in a relationship with someone because what we know is that when you try to convince or persuade someone, typically they'll lean towards the other side of the argument anyway, no matter how much you know them.

Paul Warren: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Absolutely. And you know, I think probably a key, key, three key point that people really can consider is that developing discrepancy can be a, very powerful strategy to help people to form their own thoughts and feelings about where they are and where they want to be. And that can be done without persuasion, and it can be done without confrontation.

Amy Shanahan: Right. And you shared earlier that you liked the term developing.

Amy Shanahan: As if it's building.

Amy Shanahan: Almost a building block to continue to put on the table

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Amy Shanahan: what the person is saying about what they want to do versus what they're doing to get it, or to get there and letting them see it. And are they seeing the building blocks of that discrepancy? Are they seeing the pieces on the table? And are they strategizing and moving in a different way?

Paul Warren: And ultimately, developing discrepancy becomes their building block.

Paul Warren: Because if we simply set the two pieces on the table and invite them to explore that comment on that, they then are developing their own sort of deeper understanding of how these two things can exist simultaneously. And I think that. I think the really, and you've alluded to this several times, the idea of mi spirit. I think developing discrepancy, the effective use of the strategy, requires the ability to be absolutely non judgmental.

Amy Shanahan: Very powerful.

Paul Warren: Yeah. You cannot weigh one element on the table heavier or lighter than another. And that's a skill.

Amy Shanahan: It's a skill and it's a practice. I mean, I. For so long, I thought, oh, my God, I'll never be able to do this. I'm so judgmental. And I am in a good way, too. It's not just negative judgment. So I like to point that out to folks that judgment can be influenced whether it's positive or negative. Right. So. And I remember when I watched the Brene Brown sympathy versus empathy video, and she said, as hard as that is for most of us, the judgment part. And I was like, oh, thank goodness I'm not the only one, because I've noticed, you know, that one of my mentors told me to put a rubber band on my wrist and flick it every time I have a judgment. I think within 2 seconds, I knew

that I would have calluses. Buddy, by lunchtime.

Paul Warren: Your wrists basically ended up being like bloody stumps because you'd flick that elastic band so many times.

Amy Shanahan: Well, I don't think we have to go overboard.

Paul Warren: That was, an amplified reflection.

Amy Shanahan: It was very much an amplified reflection. I didn't like it very much.

Paul Warren: Well, sadly, sadly, I cannot fall back on the excuse of we have such a long term relationship. I can speak to you that way. So.

Amy Shanahan: That's right.

Paul Warren: So, my apologies.

Amy Shanahan: Just thinking, I'm not that judgmental. The wrists are falling off. I'm just thinking of calluses.

Paul Warren: I got that wrong. You were just talking about calluses.

Amy Shanahan: That's funny. I love it. Well, but, and it's so powerful that to me, I talk a lot about pausing.

Paul Warren: M

Amy Shanahan: Instead of fighting that I should be a different person, a better person, a non judgmental person. If I worried about getting to that goal, I don't know what I'd be doing. My wrist is getting a little weak. Hanging on a string. the importance of being aware was helpful for me and being able to suspend my judgment because my judgment is irrelevant to the person's change and the person's change goal. I might think, gee, Paul, you'd lose five pounds in two weeks if you just didn't go to get ice cream. Right. And it's because I care and it's because I see things that you don't see. But that doesn't necessarily mean that that's going to help you or that's going to be the way you want to go about it. And that soft serve ice cream might be the most important thing to you because it has other important aspects in your life that I don't understand yet.

Paul Warren: And you know, Amy, your having that judgment and snapping that elastic band on your wrist there because you had that judgment does not make you a bad person or a bad clinician. What we can choose to do is know we have the judgment and not act it out.

Amy Shanahan: Right. Right.

Paul Warren: Because our judgment inserted into the conversation can have a negative impact on that person's change.

Amy Shanahan: Right.

Amy and Paul discuss developing discrepancy in Lions and Tigers and Bears podcast

We always talk about the carpenter's rule to measure twice,

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cut once, and in motivational interviewing or in any work we do with anybody, whether we're using m mi or not, we could think twice before we speak. So think twice, sometimes four or five times before we choose our words that really do matter.

Paul Warren: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, you know, I have to be honest and say I've never, looked at developing discrepancy as deeply as I feel like this conversation has taken me. And I appreciate that because it helps me to be more informed about how I can more effectively use this particular strategy when appropriate.

Amy Shanahan: And I like having these conversations to invite each other, invite others to be curious not only about what the words mean and the skills we can use to do these things. How is it that we have formulated some habits and some of my own here. That's what I love about talking to other people, is having that kind mirror back and forth that to help me change some of the habits that I have formulated in language or behavior or tone of voice.

Amy Shanahan: And I appreciate talking to you about it, Paul, that you highlight certain things, especially around words and meaning about what we're doing.

Paul Warren: M. You know, just in conclusion, you know, as maybe like a last statement from me, and I'd love to hear what yours might be about developing discrepancy. But I guess for me, the takeaway is that developing discrepancy is not a gotcha opportunity.

Paul Warren: It really is a way to help a person to look more deeply and more specifically into where they are and how they may feel about where they are now and where they want to be.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah. the last thing that I would just underscore has to do, again with the spirit, because I was thinking specifically about you putting something on the table for me that might be one versus the other. That developing discrepancy and allowing me, in other words, honoring my autonomy to look at it and being with me in a very caring way and honoring, however I respond to that in an empathic and compassionate way, is, to me, that notion of setting the environment where people feel safe to feel uncomfortable with that very thing that you're developing, the discrepancy. So to me, underlying the spirit stands out strongly for me here.

Paul Warren: Yeah, I agree with you 100%. Thank you so much, Amy. I really, really, enjoyed this conversation today.

Amy Shanahan: Me too. Thanks, Paul.

Paul Warren: You're welcome. Thank you.

Amy Shanahan: Bye bye. Thanks for listening to episode five of Lions and Tigers and Bears. Mi join us for episode six, where Amy and Paul discussed reflections and answer the questions our listeners have sent in. CASAT Podcast Network this podcast has been brought to you by the CASAT podcast Network, located within the Center for the Application of Substance Abuse Technologies at the University of Nevada, Reno. For more podcasts, information and resources, visit cassatt.org dot.

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