

## **THE USE OF APPLICATIONS AND HARDWARE DEVICES FOR THE WRITING OF MINUTES BY SECRETARIES IN GHANAIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Writing of minutes of meetings by some secretaries in many Ghanaian tertiary institutions is fraught with many challenges in terms of technology, styles, and arrangement. A lot of studies have been conducted on recording effective minutes of meetings for committees in secondary and tertiary education in Ghana; however, a research carried out by the writers of this paper revealed that almost all the studies were without the use of technology for the recording of minutes. The paper, therefore, seeks to examine the challenges of using modern technology in the area of audio and video devices in writing and transcribing effective minutes of a meeting of the committees in tertiary institutions in Ghana. There is a discussion on types of modern devices for the recording of minutes, types of audio and video recording and their formats, types of minutes, effective styles of recording minutes, and the safe custody of minutes in digital and manual format. A questionnaire, giving to a random selection of secretaries from some selected tertiary institutions in Ghana indicated that about ninety-five percent of the secretaries had none or little knowledge with regards to the use of technology for effective recording of minutes. Thus, secretaries who underwent some training with regards to the utilization of technology in taking minutes performed the job of recording minutes faster and more effectively than their counterparts without the utilization of technology.

**Keywords:** Applications, Hardware devices, Writing of minutes, Tertiary institutions, Ghana

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 The Statement of the problem**

**Effective recording of minutes is the bedrock of success for all categories of institutions.**

According to Taylor Shirley (2005) minutes and meetings account for fifty (50) – sixty (60) percent of Managers and Secretaries time in line. When they are taken efficiently, meetings are a very efficient means of assisting the decision-making process, briefing teams, changing data and problem-solving. Nonetheless, many meetings are unproductive because of poor management or being unsure of each individual's role, especially the secretary who is not up to date with modern means of recording minutes. Such a place can go a long way to affect the success of the establishment. This is because minutes show the activities of the business of institutions; thus, it serves as a record for future reference, it is a reminder on what action to be taken and also help members who were absent to get to know what had been discussed and final decisions arrived at a meeting for the running of the institution.

### **1.2 The Definition of Minutes**

Denyer (1990) opines that minutes, also known as protocols or, informally, notes are the instant written record of a meeting or hearing. They typically depict the results of the meeting and may admit a list of attendees, a statement of the matters studied by the participants, and related responses or decisions for the subjects. Minutes vary in length and complexity, depending on the type of meeting. Harrison (1996) states that minutes are a record of the proceedings of a meeting and are kept to preserve a brief accurately and clear record of the business transacted.

### **1.3 Types of minutes**

There are different categories of minutes. According to Little (2005) there may be the resolution type of minute which may be the last decision taken on an issue at a confluence, the narrative minutes, which passes on a recital of any previous minute, action minutes, which is the type of minute mainly for taking action immediately on an urgent situation in an asylum. Agenda-based minutes or reports are a traditional type of record: minutes taken at scheduled meetings for which there is an agenda. An agenda is either passed around before the meeting or declared by the chairperson at the outset, and the minutes follow the framework ready by the schedule. They are extremely specialized, complex and formal documents, and minutes are usually needed by professional minute-takers or précis writers. Informal meeting minutes or summaries are minutes which are meant for all those who attended a previous meeting, and sometimes to others who have an interest in the meeting's decisions but were not able to attend. These records may sometimes be produced using a simple template.

### **1.4 The Significance of Minutes**

According to Whitcomb (1993) any large business will organize meetings to pass along and discuss the general policy of the firm. These meetings may take the form of internal departmental

meetings, meetings of the board of directors, or general meetings of the shareholders. Each of these types of meetings will have different business to discuss, but there are a few basic rules which should be followed. While departmental or other internal meetings are usually informal, major meetings, such as the Annual General Meetings of a company will be formal affairs. Such meetings as these should have a Chairperson, a Secretary, and a Treasurer.

**The Chairman** will run the meeting, making sure that it is conducted in a proper manner and summing up all points discussed. The Chairperson will also use their 'casting vote' when the meeting is equally divided on a point.

**The Secretary** is responsible for sending out notices of the meeting, preparing an agenda; recording the minutes and making sure that the decisions, taken by the meeting are carried out.

**The Treasurer** is responsible for all financial matters and for maintaining financial records.

Gordon (1990) defines a meeting as "a number of people (from two to several thousand) who come to a pre-arranged time to discuss and usually decide upon, matters of many.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 The use of technology in taking minutes**

**Man is prone to forgetfulness, thus the use of technology such as sound and video devices help to abrogate arguments which often beset many meetings during matters arising.** It is not easy for any secretary to recollect all the salient decisions and contributions by members who were present at the meeting. It is in this regard that the use of technology as a tool for effective minutes recording is very significant. Nonetheless, many secretaries in Ghanaian tertiary institutions have little or no knowledge with regards to the use of technology in the area of audio and video for the recording of minutes. Nonetheless, one cannot make use of audio and video devices in recording minutes without knowing about various audio and video formats. There are many types of audio and video formats; however the ensuing discussing will focus on a few popular ones.

### **2.2 Types of Audio and Video Formats**

**Two most important senses used by secretaries in recording minutes are visual and audio.** It is therefore pertinent that secretaries learn about applications and formats which are directly linked with these two senses. With regards to audio formats, basically, there are two main categories such as lossy or lossless audio file format. Normally, lossy audio file formats are small in size due to compression while lossless audio formats are large in size due to

uncompression and the fact that they normally maintain most of the properties of sound. In view of that, they are of very fine quality. Examples of some popular lossy audio file formats are the Motion or Moving Picture Expert Group Audio Layer Three. (Mp3 or Mpeg 3). It is a very popular audio format with excellent sound quality in small size. It is compatible with many hardware and software devices. Another example of a popular audio format is the Windows Media Audio. (Wma). It is a Microsoft audio file format with excellent sound quality in small size and compatible with many hardware and software audio devices. It is thus very compatible with Microsoft Applications such as Office, especially with PowerPoint presentations. Advanced Audio Coding (aac) is another type of lossy audio format based on Mpeg 2 file format with fine quality and small size. Thus, secretaries recording meetings in audio format can use any of the three mentioned lossy audio formats, especially that of Mp3.

Nonetheless, there are other lossy audio formats found with mobile phone recording. Examples of such audio formats are RealAudio (RA), 3<sup>rd</sup> Generation Partnership Project (3GPP), and Motion or Moving Picture Expert Group Audio Layer 4. (mp4). RealAudio (RA) is a real network streaming media format, with good sound quality. 3<sup>rd</sup> Generation Partnership Project (3GPP) is a multimedia format with fine sound quality and popular with many Android phones. Moving Picture Expert Group Audio Layer 4 is also a multimedia audio format for both Android and iPhones. In a small meeting involving few people, secretaries can make use of their mobile phones for recording.

With regards to lossless audio formats, examples of a few popular ones are as follows; Free Lossless Audio Codec (FLAC) format. It is very popular on the internet. Waveform lossless Audio (WAV) is a very popular multimedia lossless audio format with a very fine quality of sound. An equivalent of this is that of Windows Media Lossless Audio format (WMA) by Microsoft.

Video formats are also basically in two main categories. They are thus either lossy or lossless. Examples of lossy formats are Motion or Moving Picture Expert Groups Video Layer 4 (Mp4) and QuickTime (MOV). The mp4 video format is a compression standard for networks broadcasts and video communication with small size and high-quality picture. QuickTime (MOV) is an apple format which is widely used for network transmission, and compatible with many platforms. An example of a lossless video format is Audio-Video Interleaved. (AVI). It is a popular video format which is popular with many hardware devices. An unedited video format is very useful for reference purposes, especially when there are an uncertainty and subsequent argument with regards to what was stated by a member in a meeting.

According to Carney (2000) when a secretary attends a public meeting of a government body

that is required to be open to the public by law, the secretary is free to record that meeting through note-taking, sound, and video recording devices, and photography, so long as the method of recording used is reasonable and not disruptive. Nonetheless, ability to do so, however, is on state open meetings laws. In the United States of America, for instance, when no state open meetings law affirmatively gives one the right to record, many state statutes permit the recording of speeches and conversations that take place where the parties may reasonably expect to be recorded. Thus, if a secretary is attending a meeting that is open to the public, it is likely that the people running the meeting or giving a speech should reasonably assume that they might be recorded. However, one should always take reasonable steps to make clear that recording is taking place. Concealing one's camera or recording equipment is not a good idea.

### 2.3 Applications software and processes for audio and video recording

There are many applications and devices which are very useful for audio and video recording. With regards to audio applications, either they are single-track recording or multitrack recording applications. Examples of popular and user-friendly single-track audio recording applications are *Wavelab*, *Nero*, *Pyro Audio Creator* and *Soundforge*. In terms of recording minutes, these applications are very useful for small meetings in a small room involving few people not more than twelve. In such a situation, the microphone for recording should be the surround or the dynamic type. In order to record with *Wavelab*, one has to connect a microphone to the 'in' of the soundcard for either the laptop or the desktop and click to launch the application as follows:

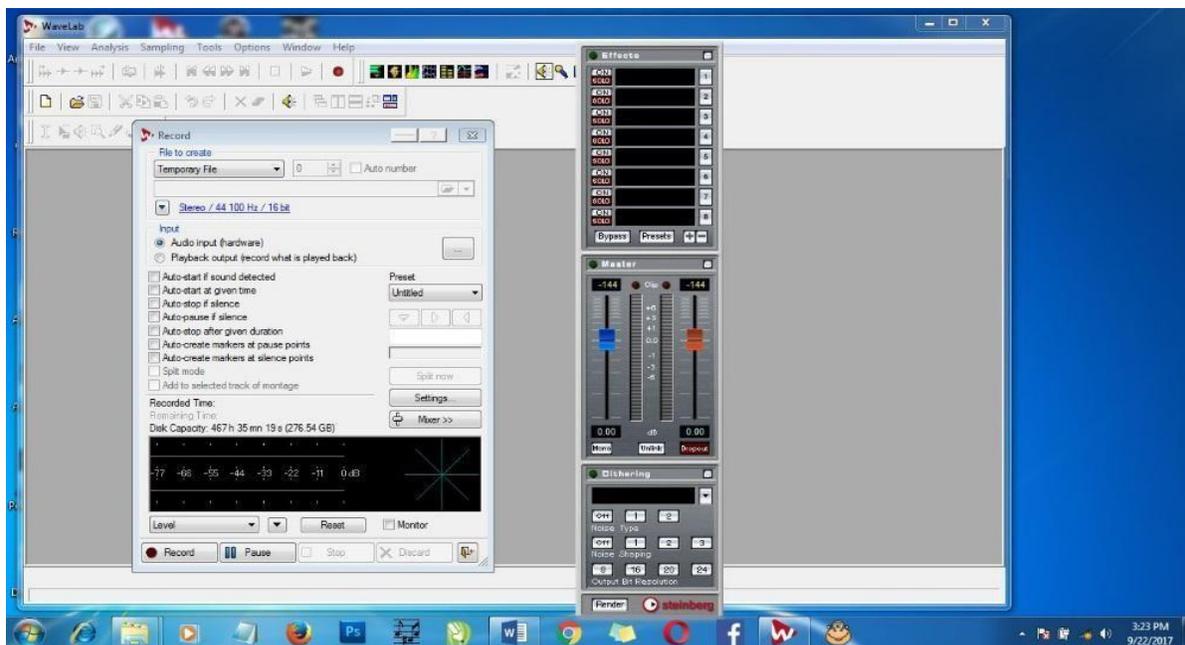


Figure 1

Click on the red button to begin recording as follows:

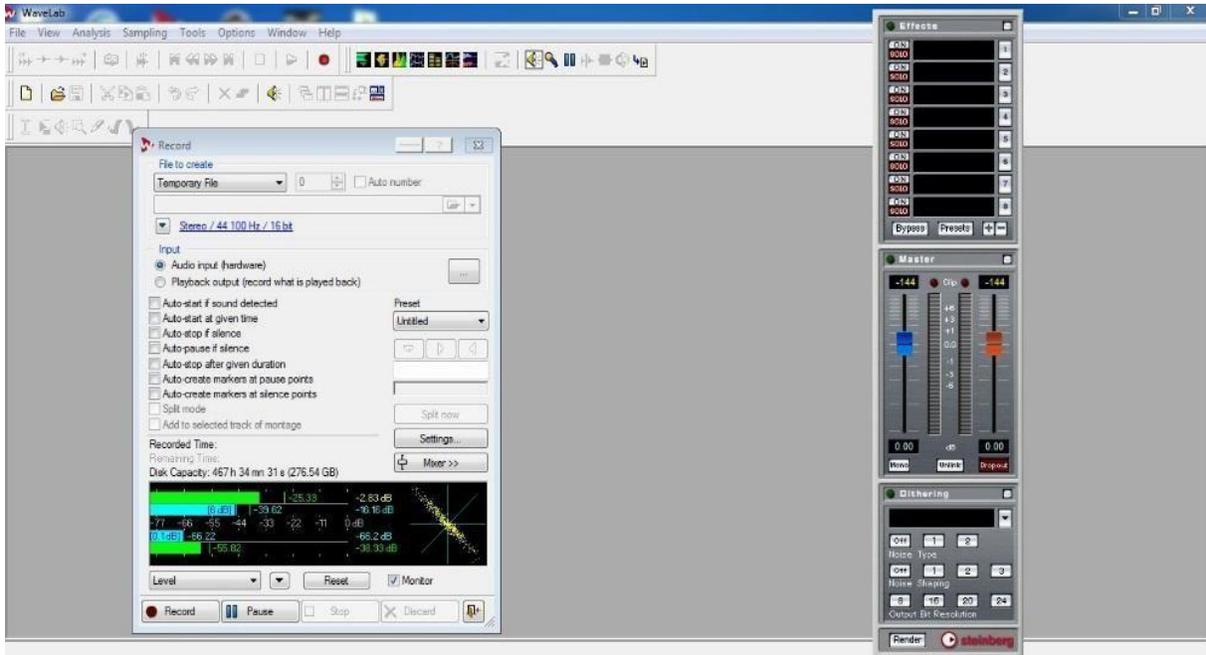


Figure 2

The indicator in blue and green colour appears on screen as seen above to indicate that recording is taking place. Click on the file menu to save the recorded minutes in a Mp3 format. Nonetheless, such applications, especially *Wavelab* is very useful for mixing of the sound so as to have a very good sound quality. Examples of some popular multi-track recording application are *Steinberg Cubase*, *Audition*, *Nuendo*, and *fruity loops*. These applications are useful for meetings involving a large number of persons. An advantage of the multi-track recording application over that of the single-track recording application is that each person in the meeting could be assigned to a track with his or her name. Thus, whatever that person said at the meeting could be recorded independently from the other members at the meeting. This means that each person has a microphone routed to a powered console with not less than sixteen channels. A cable is plugged into the “out” of the powered mixer to the “in” of the laptop or desktop sound card. Thus, in the case of *Cubase*, the interface will look as follows when it is launched.

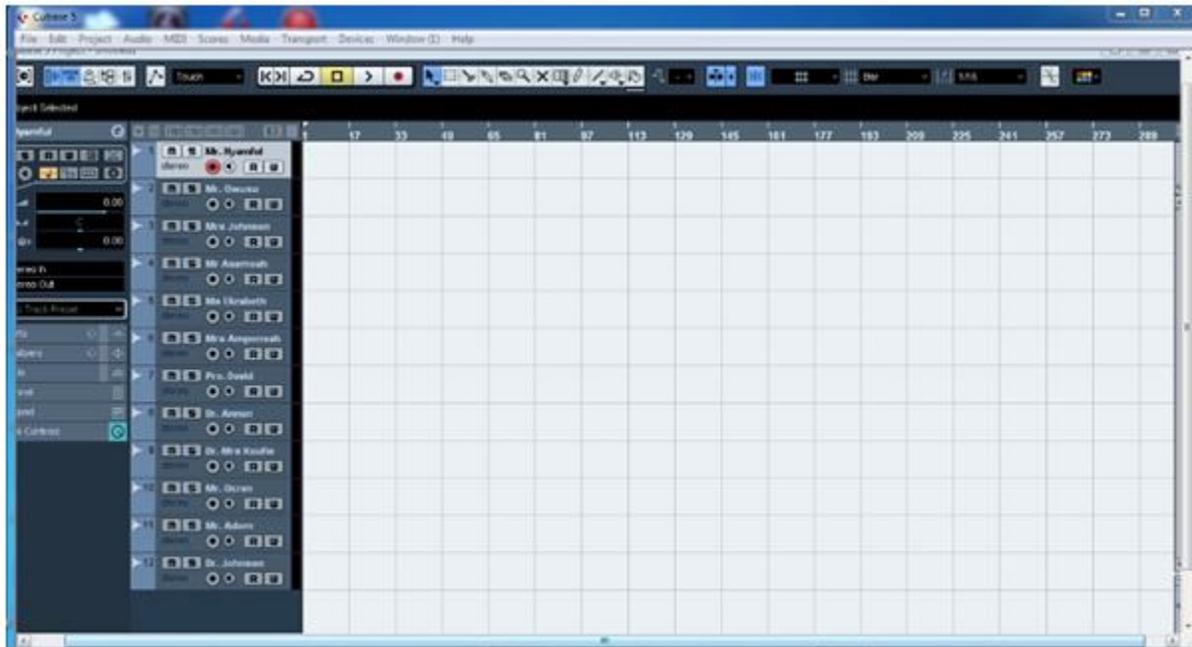


Figure 3

The above interface has twelve channels with names of members at the meeting attached. To begin multi-track recording, the tracks are selected according to the numbers of participants at the library. To begin recording, the user must hit the asterisk key on the number keypad. This will start the recording process for all the participants at the meeting.

With regards to video recording, it will be prudent for the secretary to fix the camera at a location where all the members at the meeting could be captured by the camera and start the camera just before the commencement of the meeting. The camera should be the type of a big hard disk space so that it could capture pictures for long period of time, usually, not less than five to six hours and with a good microphone. The unedited clip is very important because it could be used for reference purposes, especially, in a situation where there are arguments pertaining to statements made by some members who were present at a meeting. Examples of video recording applications which are user-friendly and popular are *Adobe Premier*, *Power Director*, and *First Cut*. After recording, the video clip it should be exported to the application and saved. An example of an exported clip into PowerDirector will look as follows:



**Figure 4**

In addition to the above means of using technology for the recording of minutes, the following could be useful.

*Livescribe, Minutes.io, and after the meeting.*

### **Livescribe**

It is a smart pen which could be a good option for the recording of minutes. Using the Livescribe pen and paper, the user can write the minutes and then transfer the written document onto the computer for the Livescribe software to convert the writing into normal computer text. Thus, at the time of writing, the Livescribe pen is connected to the computer either through the Universal Serial Bus (U.S.B) port or with the Wi-Fi Livescribe pen.

### **‘Minutes.io’**

This is a quick and easy online minute taking system. In order to make use of it, the user simply signs in to start taking digital minutes with a simple tab system for sorting the notes and assigning tasks.

### **‘After The Meeting’**

It is a system which allows the user to track actions from each meeting and check whether they have been completed. In addition, it has a useful report system which allows the user to see how

effective the meeting had been.

#### **2.4 Custody of Minutes and how minutes should be taken**

Yawson (2009) is of the opinion that it is useful to keep minutes in a loose-leaf book as this will enable them to be typed. Great care must be taken in ensuring their safety as papers can be easily lost or misplaced. Minutes should be kept locked away when not in use. The safe custody of the minutes is important as they provide a permanent record of the proceedings at a meeting and they can be referred to at a later date when the business discussed is being reviewed. In addition, soft copies should be kept on a hard disk to serve as a backup. Minutes should be written up as soon as possible after the meeting as it is much easier to be absolutely accurate when decisions are fresh in the mind. They should be written wholly in the third person and in the past tense.

It is extremely important that minutes should be:

- **Brief:** so as to produce a summary of the important matters discussed and decisions reached for reading and confirmation at the next meeting and further reference.
- **Clear:** so those absent from a meeting can be fully informed of the proceedings, and so that there is no possible doubt about previous deliberations.
- **Accurate:** so that they present a true record of the proceedings.

#### **2.5 Items That Are Found In the Minutes of a Meeting**

Secretaries should not forget to include the following items when writing minutes of a meeting:

- Name of the organization holding the meeting (e.g. Methodist University College Ghana).
- Type of meeting (e.g. General, Annual, Extra-ordinary, Academic Board, Council etc)
- Date, place, and time the meeting started.
- Names of the Chairman
- Names of those present
- Names of those absent
- Those in attendance
- Apologies
- Minutes of last/previous meeting
- Matters arising i.e. motions and resolutions or the decisions reached unanimously, as well as names of the proposers and seconders etc.
- Any other business.
- Adjournment and time (if any)

- Date of next meeting
- Signature of the Chairman and the Secretary

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

A total of thirty secretaries from five tertiary institutions in the southern sector of Ghana was selected to serve as the population for the research. Thus, six secretaries were randomly selected from each institution to answer questions to ascertain their level of knowledge on the use of technology for the recording of minutes. For gender equality, out of the six secretaries, three were female and three were male. The following questions were given to each secretary to answer.

1. Do you use technology in recording minutes or you simply record with pen and paper?
2. Have you ever read or heard about the use of technology for the recording of minutes?
3. Could the use of technology in recording devices such as microphones, digital pens and paper, camera and other devices facilitate the recording of minutes?
4. Will you want to go for training as regards the use of technology for the recording of minutes?
5. Have you met or come across any secretary in of the tertiary institutions in Ghana who uses technology for the recording of minutes?

#### **Answers to the questionnaire**

With regards to question one, all the thirty secretaries indicated that they make use of ordinary pen paper for the recording of minutes. Five of the secretaries indicated that they have heard about the use of technology for the recording of minutes but have not had the chance to or know how to make use of technology for the recording of minutes. With regards to question three, all the secretaries indicated that the use of technology could facilitate and enhance the recording of minutes. In answering question four, all the secretaries expressed the readiness to go for training as regards the use of technology for the recording of minutes when given the chance to do so. Finally, all the secretaries indicated that they had not come across any secretary in any of the tertiary institutions making use of technology for the recording of minutes.

#### **Analysis of the answers given by the population of secretaries.**

1. It was revealed by question one that in Ghanaian Tertiary Institutions, all the secretaries have little or no knowledge as regards the use of technology for the recording of minutes.

2. Answers to question two, three, four and five indicated that there is the urgent need for the training of secretaries as regards the use of technology for the recording of minutes.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSIONS**

**An effective meeting is an efficient tool in the development of any institution.** Hawkings (1999) contend that meetings enable face-to-face contact of a number of people at the same time. They provide a useful opportunity for sharing information, making suggestions and proposals, taking a decision and obtaining instant feedback. Active participation of all members of the meeting is usually encouraged. Meetings are used for a variety of purposes:

1. To coordinate or arrange activities.
2. To report on some activity or experience.
3. To put forward ideas or grievances for discussion.
4. To give information to a group of people.
5. To obtain assistance.
6. To create involvement and interest.

Meetings probably account for fifty to sixty percent of a manager's time in business. When they are conducted efficiently, meetings are very effective way of helping, the decision-making process, briefing teams, exchanging information and problem- solving. However, it is sad fact that many meetings in business are unproductive because of poor management or because of being insured of each individual's role in meetings.

Raymond (1990) stipulates that the success of a meeting depends on a variety of essential preparations. An important one is to ensure that all the documentation is dealt with efficiently. The notice and agenda are usually combined into one document.

Meetings are an inescapable aspect of life in modern organizations. Scholars contend that no organization can survive without meetings. However, one can venture to say that the only organization, which can survive without meetings, is genuinely one-man business. But even the owner will have to attend meetings elsewhere if he is to market his products or services, negotiate agreements and augment sales. In today's business world, meetings are frequent and necessary because of the need for interchange of ideas, for mutual understanding, and for decision making based on man's point view, but on that of many. The fact that man is prone to forgetfulness makes the use of technology such as audio and video devices help to abrogate arguments which often beset many meetings during matters arising. It is not easy for any secretary to record all the salient decisions and contributions by members who were present at the meeting. It is in this regard that the use of technology as a tool for effective minutes

recording is very significant. Nonetheless, many secretaries in Ghanaian tertiary institutions have little or no knowledge with regards to the use of technology in the area of audio and video for the recording of minutes. It is, therefore, the hope of the writers of this paper that workshops and training of secretaries in Ghanaian Tertiary Institutions with regard to the use of technology is given much attention to enhance and facilitate the work of secretaries in Ghanaian Tertiary Institutions.

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