



Genius Network Interview

Joe Polish, President of Piranha Marketing, Interviews:

Dr. Nathaniel Branden

Pioneer of the Self Esteem Movement

Your Life is Important!

Thoughts on Self Esteem from the Expert



Joe Polish

Joe Polish's Tempe, Arizona office – headquarters for Piranha Marketing – is often referred to by marketing insiders as “action central” for much of the entrepreneurial world. Though he made his fortune in an almost invisible niche by telling carpet cleaners how to crush the competition and turn their small local businesses into money-churning machines, he is now among the most well-known, respected, “complete marketing geniuses” in the world.

Consulting clients from many different countries each happily pay up to \$20,000 a day just to hear his advise. His “boot camps” attract convention-sized audiences full of famous entrepreneurs and many of the “superstars” of marketing and advertising.

In a business environment bristling with false prophets and bad advice, Joe's unique mix of real-world experience and stunning financial success has earned him a spot among the most trusted experts alive. His one-of-a-kind recorded interview series, “The Genius Network” is a “Who's Who” of super-savvy marketing and advertising brilliance.

No one refuses an interview with Joe. He has the gift of gab and the insight of a business veteran who's earned his success. The “best in the biz” seek him out. He knows the good, the bad, and the ugly of what's working – and what's not working – on the Web, in infomercials, in direct response ads and direct mail, in niche marketing, in personal coaching and in every critical area of the entrepreneurial landscape.

The business world is moving faster than ever before. Staying close to the action means paying attention to Joe Polish and Piranha Marketing.



Joe: Hello, this is Joe Polish, president of Piranha Marketing and founder of the Genius Network Interview Series. You're about to hear one of my Genius Network interviews. I just want to thank you for taking the time to listen to this and I hope you find it very useful.

If you want to find out more information about some of the interviews and resources that can help you in your business, you can go to www.Joepolish.com and we have a Joe Polish Recommends section, with all kinds of resources and vendors and services and products that we recommend that could help you in your business. Also, for more useful interviews and a whole list of other people that I've interviewed, you can go to www.geniusnetwork.com.

Thanks, and enjoy the interview.

Joe: Today, I am going to be doing an interview with one of the brightest human beings on the planet, Dr. Nathaniel Branden. I'm going to read you a little bit of his bio, just so I don't leave anything out. It could be way more than I'm going to say, but this guy is quite an amazing individual and I'm very happy to be doing this interview right now.

Can you hear me okay, Nathaniel?

Dr. Branden: Perfectly.

Joe: Wonderful. Okay, who is Nathaniel Branden? PhD, pioneered the psychology of self-esteem. He's a practicing psycho-therapist in Los Angeles and also does corporate consulting.

Dr. Branden offers workshops, seminars and conferences on applying self-esteem principles to the problems of modern business. He addresses the relationship between self-esteem and such issues as leadership, effective communication, and managing change.

Dr. Branden has a PhD in psychology and a background in philosophy. He's written 20 books, which have been translated into 18



languages. More than 4-million copies are in print, including the classic *The Psychology Of Self-Esteem*, originally published in 1969. In it, he explains the need for self-esteem, the nature of that need, and how self-esteem or lack of it affects our values, responses and goals.

His many books, including *Honoring The Self*, *The 6 Pillars Of Self-Esteem*, *The Art Of Living Consciously*, and a personal memoir, *My Years With Ayn Rand*, many of his books have been translated into foreign languages and, worldwide, have sold over 4-million copies.

His most recent book, *Self-Esteem At Work*, deals with the application of his work in the field of self-esteem to the challenges of business in an information age economy; which is one of the many reasons why I was so happy to want to do an interview with Dr. Branden is because most of the listeners are entrepreneurs, and I believe he has knowledge and wisdom that would be instrumental.

If you want more information about Nathaniel Branden, you can visit his website at NathanielBranden.com, which we will talk about later in this interview.

But nonetheless, let me say, Dr. Branden, thank you for taking the time to do this interview. I'm absolutely looking forward to it. I recently met you at a conference, where you were speaking to doctors and therapists. And just by luck, you happened to walk by during lunch and I asked you to sit down and have lunch with me, if you were available, which you were, and we had a great chat.

And then I gave you a ride to the airport, so you could go back to your home in the Los Angeles area. And here we are now, doing an interview.

So, anything that I didn't say about you on the bio that you think would be important for the listener to know before I start asking you some questions?

Dr. Branden:

The only thing I can think of is that I have clients both personal and corporate, but not confined to my office, the majority of which are from people around the world. And the consultation is via the telephone.



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Joe: Wonderful. So, you spend a lot of time talking to people all over the world?

Dr. Branden: On the telephone. On the telephone.

Joe: Great. I'm going to encourage people, before we even get any questions, if you've not read any of Nathaniel's books, absolutely go out and do that. The book *Taking Responsibility* is one of my favorites. *The Art Of Living Consciously* is great.

There are so many different areas, Nathaniel, that I could ask you about, but I'm going to ask you some that I think would be most applicable to our listeners, to get a real good understanding of what you know and how it would apply to their life. Ready?

Dr. Branden: Yes.

Joe: Okay. Now, you're referred to as a specialist on self-esteem, so I'd like to ask you: what is your definition of self-esteem and why should we care about it?

Dr. Branden: Self-esteem is our experience of being able to cope with the basic challenges in life, and as being worthy of love, respect, success. In a word, happiness.

Think about it this way. If we knew someone who, whatever his other assets or virtues might possess, if we knew such a person who basically felt, "Who am I to know? Who am I to think? How can I be expected to manage this change? Nobody told me about this!" we would recognize that the person involved has got a self-esteem problem.

Again, if a person communicated that they felt they don't really deserve to be loved or they don't deserve to be happy or they don't deserve to be successful, there again, surely it's obvious that you're talking about a self-esteem problem.



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So, the two elements that I talk about, which we will call *self-efficacy* and *self-respect*, capture both sides of the aspect of self-esteem.

For example, by self-efficacy, I mean confidence in our ability to think, confidence in our ability to respond appropriately to the challenges of change, confidence for our ability to cope in general with the core or basic challenges of life.

And second, self-esteem entails the idea of feeling worthy of happiness, worthy of love.

The tragedy of so many lives is they may have the talent, they may have the skill, they may have everything to succeed, except one fatal thing is missing: they feel they don't deserve it. They don't feel worthy of it. Therefore, they self-sabotage, self-destruct.

For these reasons, I condensed the whole issue into that one sentence: *Self-esteem is the experience of being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and as being worthy of happiness.*

Why is it important? Because if you don't understand clearly what the target is, you're not going to hit it.

One of the reasons why psychologists have great difficulty teaching self-esteem is because too many of them think it's a feel-good phenomenon. They think, "If I feel good with myself, I've got good self-esteem. If I don't feel good about myself, I've got bad self-esteem."

It's nowhere like that. It's not a high that you get from a drug or a love affair, what somebody told you in bed. They paid you a complement, so now your self-esteem has gone through the roof. That isn't self-esteem. It can be a pleasurable feeling. Lots of things can make us feel good, but don't necessarily have anything to do with self-esteem.

So, I might get a new car and really love it and love driving it, and I really feel like I'm on a high when I'm driving it, that doesn't mean it gives me my self-esteem. What gives me my self-esteem is more likely to be the mental operations that I performed in the context of my work, which permitted me to buy a nice car.

Joe: Right.



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Dr. Branden: So, I'm happy to say that the long road ahead, based on the emails that I received through my electronic world, more and more people seem to be accepting and signing on for my definition of self-esteem and admitting that it really does cover the issue more comprehensively than any other currently available.

In the history of psychology, there are people who tried to make self-esteem an issue of just competency or efficacy of one side or obviously talked about worthiness on the other side. I'm the first person to have ever brought the two together, the one unified theory of self-esteem.

Joe: Why that area? Why did you choose that area out of all the different...? You obviously have quite an expansive career. Why self-esteem?

Dr. Branden: I began to have a private practice very, very young in life. Today, it would be almost impossible. When I was 25 years old and working on my degree at New York University, I already had a few patients. I was always interested in what the patients are doing right when they are growing in self-esteem, and what they are missing or failing to do right when they are falling in self-esteem.

It became like an empirical question. I felt like a detective trying to learn what the key issues are that either result in self-esteem growing or diminishing. And out of that came the idea of a question, "What the heck is self-esteem, exactly?" And then, you just think about it, be aware of the context in which you use those words. And after awhile, you begin to realize what you're talking about are these two issues: the issue of self-efficacy and the issue of being worthy, and not unworthy or undeserving.

It's simply an issue of paying attention to your clients, listening to what your clients tell you, watching their behavior, and seeing. There's a significant difference in how they operate in the world. That difference relates, quite often, to the level of their self-esteem.

So, you put all this together and you arrive tentatively at the definition that I proposed. But then, you start looking for exceptions. And



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Dr. Branden:

it’s been several years now since I first put the definition into play – I guess it’s more like 15 years now – I haven’t been able to find any exceptions to the general idea that I put forth.

Joe:

Yeah. Can I ask you a question about worthiness? You said that people feel worthy or unworthy. When someone feels unworthy or worthy, is that, per se, a choice? Is it because of something that happened to them, that they’re doing, they’re not doing? Certainly, I’m not a psychologist.

For example, one of the first questions I’ll ask a new client is, “Did you feel loved by your mother? Did you feel loved by your father?” If the answer is no, the odds very much favor that there’s going to be a self-esteem problem there. It’s not natural to think, “If my own mother, my own father couldn’t love me, what am I going to expect from anybody else in this world?”

Consequently, the issue of worthiness has to do with “Am I a good person? Am I a person that other people could respect or admire?”

At the same time, it doesn’t mean that anybody in particular has to love me. Some people will like me, other people may not. That’s a different issue.

But it’s a challenge, in another way, too, that should be mentioned, which is the following: If you’re reasonably confident in yourself and reasonably confident in your right to be happy, if you can do whatever it takes to be happy, then you meet somebody and you fall in love, let’s say. It’s not shocking to you that the person loves you back. In other words, if you love the person and the person loves you, that feels kind of natural and as it should be, and it’s wonderful.

But if, instead, you feel shocked, astonished, “Oh no, this is a mistake. She doesn’t know me very well. If she really knew me,” the person feels if you really knew me, you couldn’t love me, that leads to almost losing respect for the person who got suckered, who loves you, when you knew you didn’t deserve it.

So naturally, what you’re going to see there is a sabotage of the



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whole relationship. The person that feels unworthy or undeserving will find ways to prove that he's right by doing things which have the net effect of destroying the relationship.

Joe: So, would it absolutely be a true statement that you would not be capable of loving another human being if you don't love yourself?

Dr. Branden: In the full sense of love, I would say that's correct. I would say not that you can't need the other person, not that you can't admire the person, but if there's no sense of one's own value I can't even imagine that the person could negotiate a successful marriage or successful relationship.

You see this all the time. People are afraid of being alone, afraid of being abandoned, afraid of being left out. They do things which would increase the probability that they will be left out, because they turn people off by maybe too many self-deprecatory thoughts or referrals or too many self-deprecatory statements, or too much jealousy, or too many endless demands for more reassurance that you really love me. And you can drive a person nuts who started out having a really nice, lovely, wonderful relationship that went down the tubes.

Why? Because one or both people didn't really feel that happiness was their birthright. There are people right now, who are listening to this conversation, listening to my voice, who know exactly what I'm talking about.

Joe: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. Now, just so I can make a distinction here, I think it's really important for all human beings to not only focus on, but to understand this message. A lot of people that are listening have maybe never even visited therapists or pursued any sort of development in this area. How would this apply to work? How would this apply to a business owner?

Dr. Branden: It would apply on many different levels. To begin with, the CEO or the company president sets the kind of pattern of what kind of organization it's



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going to be. A leader or a CEO has to be a teacher, in a sense. He has to be an inspirer, and he has to work on the task that needs to be done and work on facilitating the people doing the tasks that need to be done, and understand that it's not about him being brilliant, it's about him handling or bringing in people who can be brilliant.

Whether you're a manager or a CEO, the principle is the same. Unfortunately, CEO's sometimes feel themselves in a popularity contest with their own employees, so that they want to make an issue of "I'm right and you're wrong." They're eager to prove that they're right and wipe the other guy off the map.

This is no good. It's poisonous for a relationship if the person with the idea that he wants to put forth, for example, but he knows it's going to become an issue of 'the boss versus me' instead of the boss saying, "Well, this is very interesting. Let's take a look at this. Tell us more about it, Joe." You follow what I'm saying?

Joe: Yeah. Absolutely.

Dr. Branden: You mentioned a book of mine that I wrote a short while ago called *Self-Esteem At Work*, and I've just got many more examples of how a CEO's self-esteem will be manifested in the way that he manages.

One of the things that you won't see is the senior person in an adversarial relationship with the people a little bit lower down on the ladder.

When I do things sometimes for an organization, people don't initially ask me, "How do I create a culture of promoting self-esteem in my company?" What they do ask is, "How can I produce a culture in my business that will inspire people to give their best to the work?" Those are two different questions. But the answer is interesting, because the answer in both cases would be the same. Do you follow what I'm saying?

Joe: Yes. Yes, I do.



What's important is, what attitudes do we bring?

Dr. Branden:

Whether the goal is to create a culture of self-esteem or whether the goal is to inspire people to give their best, the action you'd want to take as the boss or the senior people, whoever, is the same. Treat people with respect, learn how to be genuinely open to new ideas. Creating a style of organization and of creative activity requires a sense that I've got something of value to offer. I have to give my reasons and I have to give my grounds of my belief, but I've got something worthwhile to offer. I put that on the table. It may be what we shot down, maybe it should be shot down, maybe it's going to go somewhere.

But what's important is what attitudes do we bring? Do we want the other guy to win or are we only interested in being a winner ourselves? And that's another aspect of how self-esteem shows up in a business setting, an organization setting.

Ask yourself what needs to be done, and do that – versus who's to blame, who screwed up. One can go on forever discussing.

I'll just mention one more point. Studies have been done of business failure, and they find that one of the most common problems or causes of business failure is executive fear of making decisions.

But what's that, if not a fear or a lack of confidence in one's own mind and judgment? And what's a lack of confidence in one's own mind or judgment, but a problem of self-esteem.

So, low self-esteem people tend to scapegoat, alibi, do everything except deal with what needs to be done, where did I miss the boat, what can I do to correct it. It's rather been a self-defense mode, protecting themselves against who knows what, from the higher-ups, from being criticized for mistakes made.

Of course, you know, mistakes are very interesting. There are good mistakes and there are bad mistakes. What are good mistakes? Good mistakes are when we're trying out new things, we're learning new things, and we're learning what doesn't work, as much as we learned about what does work.

Thomas Edison, as I guess everybody knows, was very strong on that point. He would talk about how much he learned. What did he learn?



And then there's almost the opposite problem...

He learned about 1,000 different things you couldn't make light with. That's what he learned.

The 11th thing is what you could do. That's about what I can say briefly.

Joe: Let me lead up to what I'd like to follow-up and say to that. For one, it's fabulous. I can totally relate to so much of what you're saying. I know our listeners can, also. It also makes me aware of so many times in my life where I was critical or not accepting of someone because of where I was at. And it also shows me in areas where I really have developed and have true confidence in areas where I actually do work and flow. So, I see both sides here.

What I do want to mention is that you have such an expansive knowledge on this. You document it in your books, so many methodologies and steps and ways to really go deep with anything that I'm going to ask you, that the main objective of me interviewing you is just to literally give people that may have not been introduced to you or people that have just a better understanding of who you are, because I would not typically say this so strongly.

But this is one of those interviews that I would encourage every person that this resonates with to simply go out and get your books, because there's so much that you have put together and laid out step-by-step. And the best that I can deliver for all of our listeners is just what I feel would be very great insights and methods. I could talk to you for a week and still learn so much.

So, let me ask you. How would someone recognize that they have a negative or low self-esteem, and how can they raise it?

Dr. Branden: There would be a lot of things. Probably discomfort with self-assertion, difficulty with self-assertion when expressing their own thoughts or feelings. That's one.

And then there's almost the opposite problem. People are restless, hungry like a child, always to be the center of attention, always the need



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for positive feedback to reassure himself that he's okay. Fear in the face of any kind of changes or operating in some new ways. We know what murder that can be in the context of business today. People are afraid of change and maybe anxious about change, and can't survive without innovation and change, and know that. God knows it's drummed into them enough, and they can be so scared in terms of what would be expected of them to make them deliver.

By now, they've got a self-esteem problem. There's no end. I could go on. I could give you more. For example, you could be in a love affair and you are continually wanting your partner to give a new proof that he or she does love you.

We all want to be loved, but that's not the point. But there is such a thing as being excessive, which implies insecurity – things that a low-self-esteem person would not quite let that run away with him.

I think I wrote about that in *Self-Esteem At Work*. There was a fellow who was the lead fellow in the research department at a major corporation, very busy, very successful. And one day, they brought in another high-caliber scientist, technologist, to work in the same organizational unit, the research unit, that the first man was in.

Now, from the point of view of the bosses, they thought they were making a contribution, bringing some new blood into this unit. It wasn't seen as a competition between the new guy and the old guy at all. But the older guy took it as "This is their way of a vote of non-confidence in me."

So, he's a little paranoid now. He keeps looking at this other guy and wondering, "Man, have they told him bad things about me?" And his behavior started to unravel. He was angry, because he felt betrayed. Didn't have good reason to. Didn't have any reason to. He had no grounds not to certainly understand they're very busy there, there's always room for another brain. It's not about A versus B or B versus A.

If you think always in those adversarial terms, I promise you, you've got a self-esteem problem.

Joe: Yeah, gotcha.



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Dr. Branden: Is this enough?

Joe: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. Absolutely. The last thing I'll ask you about self-esteem, which could probably be a long answer but I'd like to just kind of have you summarize it, you wrote a fabulous book called *The 6 Pillars Of Self-Esteem*. Can you talk a little bit about what these six are? And then, I would encourage people to go deeper with it simply by reading the book. But what are the six pillars of self-esteem?

Dr. Branden: The context for the listener, let me say, is the following: working with people for so many years, I was always on the lookout, as I said to you earlier, for what works and what doesn't work. What seems to be important for raising the level of a person's self-esteem?

I became convinced that there six principles that were essential. It isn't that nothing else mattered, but these six I knew were center and basic for nurturing good self-esteem. I'll name them, and then I'll just give a word of explanation for each of them.

- *The practice of living consciously.*
- *The practice of self-acceptance.*
- *The practice of self-responsibility.*
- *The practice of self-assertiveness.*
- *The practice of living purposefully.*
- *And the practice of personal integrity.*

What do they mean by *living consciously*? Well, I can only indicate it here very, very briefly. It means A) respect for facts: knowing that that which is, is, that which is not, is not. It's having respect for facts. It's having an understanding that wishes are feelings. They are not evidence or proof of anything.

More than that, it can be I'm thinking of when Jack Welch, who's done such a miraculous job at GE, was questioned about how he turned the



What do they mean by “living consciously”?

whole organization around and turned it into the most successful corporation in the world, what he said was very interesting. He said, “Well, what they changed, what they encouraged, what they brought to the table was A) confidence, B) a willingness to look at facts, even when they’re painful.

Well, that goes to the heart of what it means to live consciously. To look at what’s there to be seen and relevant to your goals, your purposes, your dreams. To look at it not from the perception of “do I like it or not”, but “what is it?” Yes or no?

I do a lot of sentence completion exercises on the telephone, and I’ll give a simple example of what I mean by that here.

Sentence completion plays quite central in my work. I had a client, a 48-year-old client in Houston, Texas, and one day she phoned me up in this super, super, thick, thick, thick Texas, Houston accent, and began to tell me of some new disastrous love affair she’s had.

The trouble was she was becoming so upset, that I couldn’t understand what she was saying. She was crying and her accent was getting thicker, and I was concerned because I didn’t want to leave her in this state. But I had another client lined up behind her and I didn’t have a clue as to what women do.

So, I told her every day, for a week, “Go to the office, sit down, pull out a private notebook, write at the top of the page, ‘If I bring 5% more consciousness to my relationship with X,’ X being the name of the guy, “do that for a week, come back and we’ll talk.”

Well, this cheered her up immediately and gave her something to do. She came back a different woman. She goes, “Well, Nathaniel, of course, you knew I had to get rid of that bum,” and she came up with a very lucid discussion of what was wrong with it and why her survival required she move on.

Well, here is an example of living consciously in action. We developed techniques to show people, exercises they can do, that can help them learn how to function more mindfully.

Obviously, I can’t take this much time for each of these six



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different pillars. In the case of *self-acceptance*, it kind of speaks for itself. It doesn't mean condoning or liking, it means simply the willingness to stare at whatever the truth is – what I think, what I feel, what I've done – and not to run from it because it's unpleasant. Look at it. Be aware. Stay conscious. Take responsibility.

The third pillar is *self-responsibility*. What does that mean? It means I am responsible for my life and well-being. It means I am the author of my choices and actions. It means I am responsible for the consciousness I bring to my work. I am responsible for the level of consciousness I bring to my dealings with my children. I am responsible for my personal happiness. No one is coming to rescue me. No one is coming to make the world right for me. I have to give up blaming. I have to give up alibis.

You get this so often at a marriage counselor. One person says to the other, "Our marriage would be so perfect, if only he would change." Or, "Our marriage would be so perfect, if only she would change." And they don't realize that this is a dream land. They don't have the habit of taking responsibility for their role in any aspect of life.

So, I would always be telling my clients, "No one is coming." And one client, one day, with a sense of humor, challenged me and said, "Nathaniel, you're always saying no one is coming... but you came!" I said, "Correct, but I came to say that no one is coming."

Joe: Oh, man.

Dr. Branden: Anyway, the *self-assertion* has to do with my willingness to stand up for myself, my willingness to stand up for my values and my beliefs and my convictions. *Living purposefully* has to do with being very clear about one's goals. One must be very clear about what it is we want to accomplish.

How do we go about thinking through an action plan that would allow us to reach those goals; to think through what needs to be done? Daydreaming is not having a goal. A goal is a specific target that you



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articulate. You know what it means. And you are now concerned with designing the action steps that would lead you to the actualization.

It’s really frustrating, because I would love to share this all with you in much, much more depth. But I guess the best recommendation I have is if this subject interests you and anybody listening, read *The 6 Pillars Of Self-Esteem*.

Joe: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. I wanted to touch on it, because I want people to at least understand what it’s about, so they would see, obviously, the benefit and the reason to go deep with this. This is your life work here. As far as I know, you are the pioneer and the leading, most knowledgeable.

And when I say pioneer, expert, you’ve sold more books than anyone in the world on this particular subject. You’ve probably done more research work, study on this. So, if there’s any person that I would like to introduce to my listeners, that I think could really have a meaningful impact, it would certainly be you in this area.

To not would be to do a disservice to my listeners, to introduce this to them and not heavily encourage them to read your books and go deep with this.

And even if they wanted to, you do phone consulting to corporate clients and stuff. I’d encourage people that really want to talk to you personally, you actually can be hired to do it. I’m personally going to hire you myself, to talk about some of this stuff. Even just talking to you about this, I see such a positive application.

As an example, and then we’ll wrap up on the six pillars, you talked about self-accepting.

When I saw you speak at a conference, you were taking the audience through an exercise: “If I were 5% more accepting, what would I have in my life?” I’m sitting here looking at those notes and said, “I’d have more joy, I’d have more freedom, more peace, serenity, more self-care, more acceptance of others, more fun, excitement and happiness, I’d make more money.”



We're the one species that can think an action is a rational, sensitive, ethical thing to do... and then proceed to do the opposite.

There's not only a personal application, but there's a business application. And then I circled this note that I put next to that exercise, which is, "You can't leave a place you've never been."

The point was that was very experiential, and it was a simple question that only took literally 30 seconds to a minute for me to scribble down some things that would happen, but it gave me a great insight. And that's what I want people to kind of understand, just how it doesn't take years for this to have a benefit to you.

Dr. Branden:

No, it doesn't. I love sentence completion, because it can move like greased lightning into what are the roots of problems and what steps need to be taken to remedy them.

Joe:

Let's wrap up the six pillars. Anything else you'd like to say about it?

Dr. Branden:

Speaking of the 6th one, we didn't get any mileage from this at all. So, just three or four sentences about *personal integrity*, I guess it's obvious. We're the one species that can think that such-and-such an action is a rational, intelligent, sensitive, appropriate, moral, ethical thing to do, and then proceed to do the opposite. An animal can't do that, you see.

But we humans have this unique talent that nature gave us. We think, "This is what I should do. Clearly, it would serve my best interests to do X." So, I do Y instead.

Joe:

Is it because people are crazy? Is it because they're delusional? They are many of those things. But what is that all about?

Dr. Branden:

Well, it's about a lot of different things. Even though they know, at one level, that they would be better off than they are now, at another level they're afraid of change, they're afraid of leaving their comfort zone. You're asking them to step outside of the ring of the way that you've dealt with problems or frustrations in the past, and try an entirely different method; a small example of which would be not who's to blame, but rather



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what have I done by way of contributing to this problem. What do I need to do to get us out of this problem?

Joe: They're great questions. Let me mention something here. When I, again, was at the presentation, before I had lunch with you, you made this comment. You said, "When a person comes for help to a therapist, they need an experience, not an explanation."

I thought that was profound. What does that mean?

Dr. Branden: It's brilliant. It was actually not originated by me, but by a brilliant psychiatrist many decades ago, in the 20th Century, early 20th Century. Frieda From Wrightman was her name. She was against the over-intellectualizing of the therapy process. If you come into therapy and you've been traumatized, you've been hurt, you have high anxiety or depression, an explanation of why you're having those problems may be very interesting but it's not what the primary need is.

The primary need is helping the person to have experiences – and I'll explain what that means in a minute – that would help them to overcome those symptoms.

For example, one very simple experience is the experience of listening to what the client has to say respectfully, without being in a hurry for the client to stop talking, so we can take over and be our brilliant selves and explain to them what it all means, rather than help the client to articulate what he has to say under the situation or what he thinks might need to be done.

And then, there are going to be legitimate discussions, to be sure. Being treated with respect or getting feedback that is congruent with what we ourselves are experiencing, giving us the feeling that, "My god, I'm not an outcast from the human race. I can understand people. They can understand me." That may be something brand new in that person's life, as a discovery.

The challenge, if you're a therapist, is to do things that will help to activate the self-healing powers of the client. And this can be



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accomplished by many means: by sentence completion, by energy work, by psycho-dramas of different kinds.

Most of the big schools of therapy have gotten something right; meaning they may have certain differences, but they're all aware, increasingly, that people do have internal resources with which they could move, make progress, and eliminate symptoms and problems.

Without getting into the technical aspects of the different kinds of techniques in psychotherapy, I think that it's good to have as many different colors in your pallet as possible. In other words, more than one way to attack a problem.

People, you see, don't often realize what they're capable of. They don't realize that there are things they could do that they may firmly believe they can't possibly do.

I remember once, many years ago, I had an office and I had an extra room, so I rented that extra room to a psychologist colleague. The man who came in there left his little daughter around 10:00 with me, because I wasn't seeing anybody in the next hour. So, I said, "I'll look out for her for the next few minutes."

She looks at me, and she somehow must have known that I was the boss or something. She says to me, "Mister, what do you do here?" How can I tell a 10-year-old girl what we do here? So I said, "Well, sweetheart, what I do here is I help people to see that they can know all kinds of things they think they don't know, and they can do all kinds of things they think they can't do."

And she looked thoughtful and she said to me, "That's pretty good!"

Joe: That is pretty good.

Dr. Branden: And I said, "Thank you very much. I appreciate the compliment." That always remained in my mind as a wonderful memory of feeling appreciated.



The sentence stem is like an access code to get you into the subconscious.

Joe: So, Nathaniel, going back to that comment, “When a person comes for help, they need an experience, not an explanation,” one of the things that I most admire about how you do things is you give people a lot of experiential methods of coming to their own abilities, to access what’s internal.

A lot of people in the self-help world and in the how-to world, a lot of times, they don’t need answers, they need the right questions. Thomas Edison is quoted with saying, “If I had an hour to solve a problem, I’d spend 55 minutes on coming up with the right question and 5 minutes on the answers.”

What I love so much about your stuff, your books, and from hearing you speak, is that you just really give people good questions. Not good, but great questions to ask themselves, that allow them to have an experience.

So, what are some of the ways that you would encourage people to not just learn about things but to actually integrate it into their life so they really make an effective change?

Dr. Branden: Well, there’s a lot of different ways, so just at random. I mentioned earlier that I like to work with sentence completion in different ways. I give the client an incomplete sentence, a sentence stem, as I call it, and ask the client to keep repeating that first half of the sentence but ending it differently each time.

If they get stuck, I tell clients, “Invent, but keep going. Talk nonsense. I don’t care what you say, providing it grammatically makes sense.”

So, if I want to help the people begin to integrate the things they’re learning into their actual life and behavior, I might begin by saying, “Let’s work with a stem today. If I brought 5% more self-esteem to my daily activities,” it’s a great stem because they’re really amazed at what they can articulate and what they weren’t even aware they could do.

You’re tapping in like an access code. The sentence stem is like an access code to get you into the subconscious or the unconscious. Or,



You want them to see a connection between their beliefs about themselves and what kind of life they're creating in the world.

again, if I were 5% more self-accepting, that leads you almost naturally into "I would do certain things differently."

You encourage people to think through what kinds of things they see themselves doing differently and better, if they learn to be a little more mindful, a little more conscious or they learn to be more self-accepting, so on and so forth.

How does this effect behavior? You want them to see a connection between their beliefs about themselves and what kind of life they're creating in the world.

So, you'll notice most of my books have, in the appendix, a sentence completion program that could help them to live more consciously or more responsibly or more ethically, whatever the particular target is in a particular case.

It's very exciting for me, because they are excited to see something opening up, like a closed vault for decades, and suddenly the door is just open. That's sentence completion and what it can do, and it's one of the best examples of experience, not an explanation.

Joe: Absolutely. How this has helped me, in a lot of ways, is I've coached entrepreneurs for many years. And the way I got into that is by obviously doing coaching myself.

When I say coaching, coaching is one of these over-used words where there's a lot of incompetency in the field and there's some people like in therapy, or there's great individuals that empower and help people and there's others that really don't do much of anything except keep people mired in their past.

When you can take an individual and just allow them what you said earlier, activate this self-healing power of the client, what an amazing shift and a great thing to do in this sentence completion.

Again, going back to the notes that I took when I saw you speak recently, I wrote down, "If I was 5% more self-assertive...", which you asked us to do, I wrote, "I would say no more, I would be a better entrepreneur, I would attract better people, employees, joint venture



*“I would
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partners, friends, and repel people that I shouldn't hang out with. I would have more money. I would achieve more and create more value. I'd have more joy and happiness. I'd be less anxious. I would be more loving. I would have better relationships. I would not be afraid of things. It would come more naturally to me. I would fulfill more of my own dreams.” Just a whole list of things.

The great thing about that – and, again, I'd love to hear your insights on this – is that I've read a lot of books. I've spent a good portion of my time pursuing how to evolve as a person, for many varieties of reasons. Wanting more happiness, wanting to accomplish more, just wanting whatever. A lot of times, I don't even know where the curiosity comes from. But it's this path of personal development.

And what I've learned along the way is that you can know every reason in the world why someone is unhappy by reading a book about happiness or self-esteem or whatever, but that in and of itself doesn't make you happy.

Like my friend Dan Sullivan, founder of Strategic Coach says, “You can know the benefits of being grateful or what causes gratitude because you've read a book about it, but that doesn't make you have gratitude for life.”

You really have done a fabulous job of sharing and laying out for people how to not only understand self-esteem as an example, but how to develop it by this process.

Dr. Branden: Yes.

Joe: So, how would you encourage people? Again, I feel like it's a catch-22 here. I would just love to pick your brain for hours. But just from a starting point for people that are listening to us here, if there was a starting point, where would you encourage people to start, to really just go on a path of developing themselves and being a better version of themselves, and reach their potential and do the things that people are capable of doing?



Find
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Dr. Branden: Well, they might want to begin by finding out where they feel stuck. Obviously, in the situation you described, the person has a good life and a successful life in some respects, but not in others. Is that correct?

Joe: Yes. Yes.

Dr. Branden: Okay. So, we want to find out where he's stuck. Maybe it's a fear of giving up the safety and security of a boring job, for a new job which is much more stimulating and exciting but there's much more risk involved.

So, I would maybe do a sentence completion. "The good thing about job A..." and then a little later, "The good thing about job B." And then, "If I don't leave A, if I don't go with B," you're hitting all of the possibilities. In other words, you're setting up a situation, in an accelerated way, the balances of either choice. And that can be, in itself, helpful.

Again, one of my favorite sentence stems to use when someone is stuck on something is, "If I brought 5% more consciousness or more awareness to this problem..." meaning whatever it may be, you can fill that in there, this conflict. You get the idea?

Joe: Yeah, totally. I even used this. I wrote, from hearing you talk about this sentence completion the first time I was introduced to it, I wrote, "What am I doing to raise, by 5%, the consciousness of my clients, of my workouts, of my team?"

So I, very much, I'm a complete buy-in to what you're talking about here.

Dr. Branden: That's good to know, obviously. So, the point is that one of the more interesting ways you can work with this is if you're leading a group in some kind of a program. You put them into a sentence completion program, let's say, or that's what you're going to use, you show them how to but then you encourage them. You don't give them explanations, you



Hearing
us talk
about it
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don't tell them, "Your problem really is," you just get them pumping out sentence stems until you hear that bingo and the person gets it. Now he really is feeling what we were talking about at a much deeper level than normally.

Joe: Yes. Yes. That's the key. I believe that's why I feel what you do and have written about is so much more different than other "methods" of people feeling better about themselves or feeling happy.

I feel I was even doing some of this in my own coaching, without ever understanding it at the level that you do. And it just enhances it that much more.

My friend Dan Sullivan, to mention him again, has a program called Strategic Coach for entrepreneurs, and I've known Dan, we've been friends for over a decade. And when you go to that program, you're not going there for answers, you're going there for questions.

My friend Dr. Edward Hallowell, he's of the same sort of thing, where sentence completion isn't the term that's used but that is one of the mechanisms used to get people to have an experience. And you just have written all of these great books and have all of these step-by-step processes that I cannot imagine if people just took what we talked about on this interview and just tested it, take a few minutes and do it. Hearing us talk about it is one thing. But to actually have someone sit down and write, "If I was 5% more self-accepting or 5% more self-assertive," and made a list and just see what you come up with, you'll see just how incredible this brain that we have is and what it can actually do when it's properly directed, I guess.

Dr. Branden: That's true. But not to confine ourselves to sentence completion, I'll tell you one other story, very briefly, of where an experience is worth 1,000 explanations.

I was running a group some years ago, and I was making a point that a lot of us really did come out of very, very rough-and-tough homes where they grew up with very dysfunctional parents, etc.



*I asked him
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So, it isn't that nobody's got a real story. It doesn't change the fact that we have to take responsibility, as adults, for where we go from here.

Anyway, this one psychiatrist was very skeptical. He said, "I seem to be thinking that just about everybody in the world has been traumatized, and I've never been traumatized. In fact, I've had a wonderful job, etc., blah, blah." And that, with somebody, could be true. But I didn't think it was true of him. That is to say I watched him and I could – let me put it so grossly – smell trauma.

So, I asked him if he'd be willing to conduct a small experiment with me. I wanted to take him through a simple, psychological exercise and would appreciate it a lot. "And maybe you would learn something, maybe I would learn something, maybe the group would learn something, if you're willing."

He said, "Okay," somewhat laughing at me. But he said, "Okay."

So, I said, "I want you to close your eyes and I want you to imagine that you're in a room in the hospital. And you're lying on your bed there, trying to get used to the fact that you're dying. You're not in great pain at the moment, but you know the symptoms and you know that you don't have a lot of time here."

"And as you're thinking about that, your father comes into the room. He comes over to your bed and he just stands there, looking at you, and you look up at him. If ever you wanted to get a message through to him, with him listening, it would be now. It may be the last chance there'll be. So, what I want you to do is to talk to your father and, above all, tell him what it was like to be a child growing up in your house. I want you to talk aloud. I want you to talk to your father. I want you to see your father looking down at you. And when you're ready, I want you to feel free to go right into that and talk to your father, until I call time."

So, we did this for a few minutes and then some tears began to form and roll down his cheek. He wanted to stop at that point, but I encouraged him. I said, "I'd like you to give it a little bit longer. What do you say?" He said, "Okay."

So then, I had him talk to his mother, and he got even more



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emotional. And pretty soon, through the things he was saying, you were getting a very rich portrait of what aspects of his childhood home was like. But you also had cracked open the vault and he could now feel the pain of a trauma that he'd been denying all of adult life.

So, that's an example of what I mean when we talk about an experience. You give the person an experience, there's nothing to argue about after that. If you can create the right experience for the right problem and you can make that issue, which was largely unconscious, now largely conscious, then you've taken a very big step. Then you can get into other things, including playing conversations, question asking, role-playing, a lot of different exercises.

Joe: There's so much to this that could be done and so many, I guess, ways to access it. What I would like to ask you is, what is your opinion the whole state of therapy and self-help in general? How do you look at it?

Dr. Branden: Well, it's a very exciting time. It seems to me that every 10 minutes I'm reading about some new work that somebody's doing. I'm not a kid anymore but, still, it can be very exciting to read about something new that I've never heard of, and wondering, "Do I have time that I could try that out?" It's a great game, in a sense.

So, I feel one has to be skeptical, one has to be careful about what one embraces. But assuming you're reasonably common sensical and know that there are differences and some of the stuff that's claimed for, not that it's useless, but it's touted for more than it can deliver. That's very common.

I feel sorry for somebody out there looking to know who to go to for help, because there are so many people out there. Everybody and his brother, now it seems, wants to be a psychotherapist. People often come to me after they've gone through five or six, who they gave up on after two or three sessions, and just felt they don't like them for a variety of reasons.

So, I think that some of the most exciting work that's going on is in this new field called *The Promise of Energy Psychology*. That's a book



Sometimes
it's an
act of
self-
responsibility
to hunt
down
a good
therapist.

you can get from Amazon. I can't even think of the spelling of the author's name. David Feinstein, I think.

But anyway, all you need is *The Promise of Energy Psychology*. It's a fantastic book that covers the whole other approach that I've gotten into today called work with the body's energy system.

Albert Einstein, in the 1920's, told us that a human being is, in effect, a walking energy system. What psychologists have been doing in the last two or three decades is learning how to work with that energy system to heal and help unhealing wounds. So, it's terrifically valuable, especially for working with trauma.

Joe: Let me ask you about your fabulous book called *Taking Responsibility*. There's a point you make where you say that we shape our identity through what we are willing to take responsibility for. Can you talk about this? Because I think it's so valuable to our listeners, that whole subject of taking responsibility. And, again, the statement "We shape our identity through what we are willing to take responsibility for."

Dr. Branden: Yeah. Most problems have, as one of their elements, a failure of the person involved to take adequate responsibility with regard to solving the problem.

That doesn't mean that if he or she did take more responsibility, the problem would automatically get solved. No, it won't. You may need extra help. You may need professional help.

But sometimes, it's an act of self-responsibility to hunt down a good therapist. Go to the therapist. That is also self-responsible. It doesn't mean literally doing everything yourself. That's a big mistake. It doesn't mean never asking for help. Just the opposite. It means taking responsibility for asking for help, searching out resources in the world that can help you solve your problems.

That's just background. I'm not there yet at answering your question. That's kind of background context for me.

Okay, so now here's the deal. Suppose you come to see me and



“What’s
up to me?
What
needs to
be done?”

you’re complaining, “My mother did this and my father did this,” and it sounds pretty awful. “No wonder I yell at my wife. Sometimes, you just can’t help yourself. God knows I saw enough slapping of faces when I was a kid, growing up. I didn’t like it then and I suppose I shouldn’t like it now, either. But, you know, it’s just too much for me to handle. I can’t cope with this. I give off steam that way. I know shouting at the kids doesn’t help anybody, but it helps me let off steam.”

Now, here you see me attempting to act out apparitions not at all self-responsible with regard to dealing with these issues. He’s got an alibi for everything. He’s got an explanation for everything.

And who doesn’t have an explanation for everything? We all have got our own story. It’s not an issue of saying it’s not important. Of course, it’s important. But it’s not important in the sense of relieving us of responsibility. It just can help us to make our self-responsibility acts more effective. That’s a different issue. Do you get what I’m driving at here?

Joe: Yes. Absolutely.

Dr. Branden: All of us are self-responsible about some aspects of our life and not other aspects of our life, with rare exceptions. I know people who seem to be pretty damned near responsible for everything in their life. Maybe they are. But I’ve never seen anybody who could be successfully not responsible and still do more than get out of bed in the morning.

So, the big question becomes what am I responsible for? What’s up to me? What needs to be done? What can I do to help solve my own problems?

To say it again, it doesn’t mean not asking for help. Asking for help can sometimes mean expression of self-responsibility.

You know the old joke – I don’t think it’s true – about what’s wrong with men drivers is that men will never ask a person for directions? They wouldn’t want to be deprived of something they don’t know. I don’t know if that’s true at all. I don’t think so.

But anyway, it makes a point here. It is an act of self-



“People choose to be right over being happy.”

responsibility to realize “I don’t know, this person might know,” and then to ask.

Joe: I believe that very much. I’m certainly one of those people who would always ask for directions, and think if you’re lost and you’re not asking for directions, it’s pretty idiotic. Ask for directions. That’s at least my world.

I think part of being a responsible individual is knowing that if you can get more direction if you simply ask for it or pursue it, that’s just a good thing. That’s going to help your life in so many areas.

A couple more things I want to ask you, and then we’ll go ahead and wrap up.

You mentioned something in the speech that I saw you give, that I wrote down. You said, “People vote to be right over being happy.”

Dr. Branden: Oh, yeah.

Joe: Can you explain what that means?

Dr. Branden: Sure. I’ll give you a very fast, simple example. “I don’t deserve to be happy. My fate is to be left. Nobody’s really going to love me enough to stand by me. I’m destined to be alone in the end. I’m destined never to really have somebody close who loves me.”

Now, I go to a social event and I meet a woman. I’m attracted to her. She seems to be attracted to me. And I ask her out and, somewhat to my surprise, she agrees. So, we go out for dinner and we begin to talk. I’m somewhat surprised I found that she’s easy to talk to.

After I drop her off at her home and I’m going back into my home, I’m feeling kind of a drunken disorientation. I don’t know how to fit what’s happening with this woman into what my life is about.

Well, the answer is probably, “It’s not going to last very long, so enjoy it while it lasts.” It’s only a matter of time until it’s going to be blown up. For whatever reason, this woman decides not to be manipulated by his erratic behavior. She thinks she loves him, so she



The root of a lot of unhappiness is too much stress in people's lives.

perseveres. And now, he's really getting confused because she's fighting for him. That's almost like a miracle.

Now, he can be happy for as long as 6 or 8 months. And then, the old anxiety pops its head once again and says, "This is not your story. It's not going to be here next year or next year or next year."

When she leaves, when she finally gives up on me and she leaves me, I pace the apartment and I say to myself, "Well, what did you expect? You knew from the beginning what the story was going to be, and you played it out. And you were right."

Now, being right, to some people, is more important than being happy. They don't believe in happiness in the first place, except in a very short-term kind of way.

We can be filled with the level of expectations, which we help to become realized in the world. And then we say, "How right I was." And we get a bitter satisfaction in being right.

Instead, one could be challenged with the situation and say, "Okay, where did I go wrong? What mistakes did I make? What could I do differently next time?"

Joe: Let me ask you one more question about happiness. What do you feel is at the root of happiness, and why are so many people today so unhappy, or at least it appears that way?

Dr. Branden: I think that the root of a lot of unhappiness is too much stress in people's lives, poor health, having to work harder today to live less well than one did a decade or two ago, believe it or not. Everything is harder today. And that's an aspect of this problem.

But the root of happiness, I think, has to do with what we are primarily focused on. We have a choice: be focused on what's good in my life or to be focused on what's troublesome in my life.

I think that people who are predominantly happy souls are people who are much more oriented toward the good things in their life than towards the things which are unhappy or painful or troublesome.



What we focus on in life has an awful lot to do with whether we're feeling happy or not.

I think that people who are predominantly unhappy tend to focus much more on failures than successes. A person who is basically happy, he knows there are negatives. He kind of rests them in the back of his brain. And he can look at them from time to time, especially if there's some action that needs to be taken.

But in the foreground of his consciousness are all of the negatives, and they're brightly lit. When you move to the back of the brain, the lighting is very poor. In the back of the brain are the positives in your life, but they're illuminated only very dimly. In the front of your brain, the negatives are illuminated very brightly.

So we know that what we tend to focus on in life has an awful lot to do with whether we're feeling happy or not; which is why I always encourage people to learn to think, "What's good in my life and what needs to be done?" Think about that. Think about writing an exercise that you might write every day for a week or two weeks or a month. "What's good in my life?" Think how many items you can put under that. And then, "What needs to be done to make my life happier?"

Joe: If we just have that as part of this interview, where people spent the next week just writing down, for a few minutes every day, what's good in my life and what needs to be done, that would create such a huge experience for people.

There's so much more I'd like to ask you. I'll just ask you any other thoughts you have on that and any famous last words, and then I'd love to have you give out some contact information and recommendations, so people can go deeper with everything we talked about.

Dr. Branden: It's very kind of you. I don't know if this is a full response or not. I've been writing books for a long time. And one day, it occurred to me that there's a kind of a theme that runs through everything I've written, almost. The core message coming from Branden is Your Life is Important. Whether you are happy or not is important. Whether or not you accomplish the things you want in life is important. Treat your happiness



Treat
your
life as
important.

as something worth fighting for. Treat your life as important.

Joe: I wouldn't know anything else I could say that would be more important and valuable than that. Your books are not just great books to read, you're not just a great writer, but what they do is they give people real-life capabilities and they give people real direction, and there's real success knowledge that are in your books and everything that you've done.

So, I'd love to do another interview with you after we put this one out and see what sort of feedback we get.

Dr. Branden: I have a suggestion, if I may.

Joe: Yes?

Dr. Branden: A book of mine that I published in 1980 has been somewhat revised and updated, and the new edition of the book will be in the bookstores in a few weeks. The book is called *The Psychology of Romantic Love*. Subtitle: Romantic Love In An Anti-Romantic Age.

Joe: Great title.

Dr. Branden: It would be great fun, if you felt like it, to read the book when it's out there, and we'll do a show on man/woman relationships.

Joe: Absolutely! I'd love to. That would be great. Nathaniel, again, thank you so much. I learned a tremendous amount, as I always do, reading or listening to you. A very, very sharp guy. I know my listeners are going to get a ton of value out of this.

So, what I would like to do is not only encourage my listeners to give me your feedback on this interview, but also go to NathanielBranden.com. And Nathaniel, if they every want to do any corporate consulting with you, counseling over the phone, how do they go about doing that?



*Eat
Your
Competition
Alive!*

Dr. Branden: Email is the best way. NathanielBranden@yahoo.com. I'll also give you a phone number. (310) 274-6361.

Joe: Great. Thank you so much. And all of that information will also be in the transcripts of this interview, also for our listeners.

And again, thank you so much for taking the time to do this.

Dr. Branden: It was a great pleasure. You made it very easy. The questions, of course, were very interesting, natural ones. But you certainly made it very easy. And I hope it will be useful to people.

Joe: I absolutely know it will. And I absolutely, if you're available to do a follow-up, we will certainly do so. And to all of my listeners, thank you for taking the time to listen to this. Have yourself a wonderful day, and we will talk next time.

Hello, this is Joe Polish. I want to thank you for taking the time to listen to this interview. I hope you found it very useful. Please give me your feedback on all of the interviews that you listen to. I love to hear your feedback, so we can always deliver a great program for you.

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