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CHANGES
UNTIL
YOU DO



*A Guide to
Self-Compassion
and Getting Out of
Your Own Way*

MIKE ROBBINS

AUTHOR OF *FOCUS ON THE GOOD STUFF*

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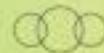
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Praise for **Nothing Changes *Until You Do***

"In *Nothing Changes Until You Do*, Mike Robbins shares ageless wisdom that is far too often overlooked because of its seeming simplicity. Don't be fooled! This book cover should be stamped in gold lettering: 'Contents 100% authentic.' Breathe deeply as these compassionate teachings open your heart."

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"This book is filled with quick, compelling, and actionable ideas. Mike Robbins uses his personal experience to help all of us see how we can take small steps toward a better life. Reading this book will give you a new way to think about how you interact with the world."

—**Tom Rath**, *New York Times* best-selling author of *Eat Move Sleep* and *StrengthsFinder 2.0*

"*Nothing Changes Until You Do* focuses on an important and often overlooked aspect of compassion . . . having compassion for oneself. Mike Robbins's approach is both heartfelt and practical, which is why he continues to be such a popular speaker at Google."

—**Chade-Meng Tan**, *New York Times* best-selling author of *Search Inside Yourself*, and Google's Jolly Good Fellow

"Mike Robbins has a unique ability to open people's minds, touch their hearts, and teach valuable lessons about life and business. I have personally benefited from his work, as have so many of the people on my team."

—**Jack Calhoun**, president of Banana Republic

"I've had the great pleasure to witness Mike grow as a family man and as an author. As a mentor, years ago my late husband, Richard Carlson, passed a torch to Mike whom he loved like a younger brother. Mike offers such wisdom and heart in *Nothing Changes Until You Do*. These pages will thoughtfully show you how to live like he does—authentically happy and grateful for every day."

—**Kristine Carlson**, co-author to the #1 *New York Times* best-selling *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff* book series

"Mike Robbins rocks . . . he's definitely one of my 'spiritual running buddies.' *Nothing Changes Until You Do* is a beautiful book filled with wisdom that is both deep and accessible at the same time. By reading this book you'll experience more kindness, love, and acceptance for yourself and others."

—**Gabrielle Bernstein**, *New York Times* best-selling author of *May Cause Miracles*

"Mike Robbins's wisdom and insight are so important in both business and life. Self-compassion, as Mike reminds us in *Nothing Changes Until You Do*, is essential to everything we do."

—**Chip Conley**, founder of Joie de Vivre Hotels and *New York Times* best-selling author of *Peak*

"Mike Robbins lives his message. He is truly as kind, wise, generous, and joyful as he teaches us to be in *Nothing Changes Until You Do*—and that's why I trust him. This guy is onto something. I don't want to just read more of him; I want to be more like him."

—**Glennon Doyle Melton**, *New York Times* best-selling of *Carry On, Warrior* and creator of Momastery.com

"Mike Robbins is a master at teaching us how to become the best version of ourselves. I highly recommend you read this book and let it inspire you to be a better you so you can change the world for the better."

—**Jon Gordon**, author of *The Energy Bus*

"There is no shortage of self-help books on the market. What makes *Nothing Changes Until You Do* different is Mike Robbins's one-of-a-kind talent for combining the power of story with a deep understanding of human motivation and a disarming vulnerability that renders his essays at once profoundly wise and yet universally accessible. Mike's gift is his ability to convey transformative universal truths through authentic stories that connect with readers through shared emotional experiences. Readers who want to benefit from the wisdom of contemporary philosophy along with the joy and fun of personal reflection will love this book."

—**Eric Severson**, senior vice president of
Global Talent Solutions for Gap Inc.

"*Nothing Changes Until You Do* is a sweet and wise book written by a sweet and wise man. Full of refreshing insight and gentle wisdom, this book reveals its secrets as Mike reveals his compassionate humanity. Easy to read, easy to relate to, and easy to inspire."

—**Frederic Luskin, Ph.D.**, author of *Forgive for Good*
and director of the Stanford Forgiveness Project

"Mike Robbins is a coach of the first order. If you're looking for an honest, down-to-earth, and practical approach to bring out what is best inside yourself, read *Nothing Changes Until You Do*—you won't be disappointed!"

—**Tim Ryan**, U.S. Congressman from Ohio
and author of *A Mindful Nation*

"Mike Robbins is amazing! The stories and ideas contained in the pages of this beautiful book are infused with authenticity and awareness. Reading this book is a gift for your soul."

—**Lynne Twist**, co-founder of the
Pachamama Alliance and author of *The Soul of Money*

"Mike Robbins is the real deal. He's honest and vulnerable, courageous and wise. He writes about real life, his personal highs and lows. By sharing himself so openly, he brings us back to ourselves, to our own life, and to what really matters most."

—**Robert Holden**, author of *Shift Happens!* and *Loveability*

“Mike Robbins is a gifted storyteller. The stories, ideas, and insights he shares in *Nothing Changes Until You Do* are important and impactful. Like when he has come in to speak to my team at Google, Mike’s wisdom is beneficial in both business and in life.”

—**Alan Moss**, vice president of U.S. sales for Google

“With stirring prose and focus, Mike Robbins will empower you with the latest wisdom on self-compassion and kindness. Read *Nothing Changes Until You Do*. It will change your life and the lives of the people around you.”

—**Dacher Keltner, Ph.D.**, professor of psychology at UC Berkeley and author of *Born to Be Good*

“Mike Robbins is a great author, speaker, and friend. We have known each other for more than 20 years and I’ve seen firsthand the ways he has inspired me and others. Whether it is motivating my staff and players or being a living example of positivism, he continues to be an influence in my life. *Nothing Changes Until You Do* is a wonderful book that will inspire you to live a life full of perspective!”

—**AJ Hinch**, vice president, assistant general manager of the San Diego Padres

“Mike Robbins has taken a unique and enlightening approach to self-compassion in *Nothing Changes Until You Do*. Through vulnerable and inspiring stories he not only teaches us the importance of being kind to ourselves, but exemplifies it in the process.”

—**Kristin Neff, Ph.D.**, author of *Self-Compassion*

“*Nothing Changes Until You Do* is a brilliant guide to the value of changing and exquisitely loving yourself through what life brings us. Mike Robbins’s book is filled with fresh truths, shared vulnerabilities, and uncommon insights to open your heart and support you in the beauty of change and self-love.”

—**SARK**, author, artist, succulent wild woman, PlanetSARK.com

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*A Guide to
Self-Compassion
and Getting Out of
Your Own Way*

MIKE ROBBINS



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Introduction

This book is about one of the most important and challenging aspects of life—our relationship with ourselves. What I’ve noticed in my 40 years of living, especially in the past 13 as a coach, speaker, and author, is that it doesn’t matter our level of success or the specific circumstances we face in life—the most essential human relationship we have is the one with ourselves. Sadly, many of us don’t have a very healthy or empowering internal relationship and there seems to be an epidemic in our culture of self-criticism, self-doubt, and thinking that our inherent value is directly connected to what we do, the status of our relationships and family, the money we have, our appearance, or any other number of external factors. None of which is true.

The more unhealthy and critical our relationships are with ourselves, the more it manifests in various negative ways in our lives. We sabotage our success; turn to addictions of all sorts (food, work, alcohol, drugs, sex, technology, and so on); treat the people close to us in unkind ways; damage our bodies; and create drama, conflict, and suffering in many areas of our lives. These behaviors are inconsistent with self-compassion, self-acceptance, and self-love, which are the core themes of this book.

Making peace with ourselves is fundamental to everything that truly matters in life. When we genuinely feel good about who we are, and when we treat ourselves with kindness and love, everything flows from there. Regardless of how “good” or “bad” the circumstances or situations in our lives may be, our ability to deal, respond, succeed, and

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ultimately thrive has everything to do with how we relate to ourselves.

I've been speaking and writing about these important themes for over a decade, and I am passionate about them. They are also things that I have found (and continue to find) difficult in my own life. I subscribe to the philosophy of "we teach best what we most need to learn." In that spirit, I'll start by sharing some of my own journey, which led me to write this book specifically.

I haven't written a new book in five years. My first book, *Focus on the Good Stuff*, came out in 2007 and my second book, *Be Yourself, Everyone Else Is Already Taken*, in 2009. In the span of just three years, I wrote two books and my wife, Michelle, and I had two daughters (Samantha, who is now eight, and Rosie, who is now five). It was an incredible and exciting time for us in so many ways—filled with many of the things Michelle and I had dreamed about when we first got together. However, by the end of 2009, I felt exhausted and confused. As I reflected on the previous three years, in particular that year of 2009, I was disappointed, disheartened, and overwhelmed by life, work, and fatherhood. And most painful and insidious of all was that I felt awful about myself. Here I had all these things that I said I wanted, but I wasn't happy—in fact, I was pretty miserable.

Somewhere along the way I had lost touch with my passion, purpose, and inspiration. I had fallen into the traps of both survival and ego-edification. I was trying to keep up with the various demands and pressures of my expanded life and trying to prove to others (and myself) that I was good enough, worthy of attention and recognition, and legit as an author, speaker, coach, husband, father, and man.

That was a particularly rough year for both Michelle and me. Although we had a lot of "good" things going on (at

least on the surface) and we expected it was going to be a monumental year of success and growth for us, it ended up being filled with disappointment, struggle, and definitely some growth (but not the kind we wanted). Due to a variety of factors, by the end of the year, we found ourselves \$105,000 in debt and more than \$300,000 upside down on our house (having “bought” a home we really couldn’t afford, which we financed 100 percent, near the top of the market in an area that went down in value significantly when the housing bubble burst).

In addition, parenthood was kicking our butts big-time, and while we never expected it would be easy, we weren’t prepared in any way for how relentless, all-consuming, and fundamentally life altering it would be. We love our girls deeply, but being parents was really hard at times, and it was taking a big toll on each of us individually, as well as on our marriage.

I had lost my way and was in a state of deep emotional pain and confusion—questioning just about everything about myself, my work, and my life. I’d gotten so caught up in trying to keep up, achieve, and produce that at some level I felt like I’d forgotten who I was and why I was doing the things I was doing in the first place.

That difficult year, as painful and humbling as it was, turned out to be a beautiful catalyst for growth, healing, and change. I remember saying to Michelle at one point toward the end of 2009, “What if we stop trying to *look* happy and successful, and actually focus on *being* happy and successful? I bet if we actually *are* happy and successful, we’ll look like it, too.”

Since then, life has taken some interesting, intense, and miraculous twists and turns. There’ve been some huge highs and some incredibly difficult lows, and I’ve learned

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an enormous amount—about myself, my work, my life, and the world around me.

Some of the most difficult challenges have been dealing with the death of my mom from lung cancer, our financial difficulties, and our two miscarriages. I've also had some deep and painful struggles with my own self-criticism and self-loathing—often focused on my appearance, as well as being constantly challenged by the competing demands of my business, my family, and my personal growth and desires. Sometimes I feel as though I'm letting down the most important people in my life, including myself, because I don't know where to focus my time and attention.

In addition to these painful experiences, which have been growth inducing and transformational in many ways, there have been some amazingly exciting and wonderful things that have manifested in my life during these years. We were able to do a short sale on our house and exit with integrity in a way that felt good and responsible to us, all things considered. Miraculously, within an 18-month period, we not only got out from underneath the mess of our house situation but also paid off our entire debt and set up a responsible, reality-based financial plan. Our girls have been thriving in their new school, and parenthood has gotten easier and more enjoyable. While it still kicks our butts all the time and Michelle and I sometimes look at one another as if to say *What were we thinking?* we're having more fun and doing things that create greater joy, adventure, and excitement for our girls and our family.

My speaking business has grown in wonderful ways, giving me the opportunity to travel around the country and the world, sharing my thoughts and ideas with some pretty cool clients like Google, the San Francisco Giants, Gap, Twitter, Charles Schwab, eBay, and many more. And, thanks

to the success of my business, our continued commitment to our financial health and awareness, and the sale of my mom's house, not only have we remained debt-free, but we've been able to save and invest a significant amount of money (for the first time in our lives), as well as move into an amazing new house in a community that we love!

More important than any of these external successes and accomplishments is that I feel like I've been able to go deeper into myself, my growth, my healing, and my own transformation over the past few years. I've made my own self-care, personal growth, and spiritual connection more of a commitment in my life. I also feel like I've started to live and embody more of what I've been speaking and writing about over these past many years in terms of self-appreciation and self-love.

As I've gone through all of these twists and turns, and as I've continued to work with people from all different walks of life, I've been constantly reminded that everything comes back to our relationships with ourselves. And, no matter what it is we're facing, the most important and difficult aspect of it is always how we relate to ourselves.

If we can figure out a way to be authentically gentle, kind, and loving to ourselves as we attempt to do whatever it is we attempt to do, our chances of success and fulfillment increase dramatically. If we don't, it can make the smallest task, action, or desire seem like a mountain we can't even begin to climb. In other words, *Nothing Changes Until You Do!*

As excited as I am to be writing this book and sharing it with you, the scariest and most challenging part of it is dealing with that negative voice in my head, my gremlin (aka my inner critic), who constantly tells me all the reasons why I can't or shouldn't. This is how the gremlin works: It's

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critical. It's mean. It's judgmental. Its only goal is to convince us that we're small, weak, and unprepared. The gremlin, which is the voice of our negative ego, lies to us about who we really are and tries to hold us back. Unfortunately, we listen to and believe the gremlin too often.

This book is about how to take back your power from the insidious and negative impact of your gremlin and be gentle with yourself in the process. In the chapters that follow, I share stories from my own life and from the lives of others—with insights, questions, suggestions, and ideas about how you can be more kind, forgiving, and appreciative of who you are and how you are, right now. Not after you've figured it all out, lost some weight, made more money, found the right person, or somehow become the "perfect" version of yourself.

I've learned a lot through various experiences, and from many teachers, counselors, mentors, friends, and others. I have figured some things out and struggled to make sense of many other important aspects of life. My intention in writing this book is to share some of these experiences and insights with you in a way that can help you on your journey of growth, discovery, and fulfillment.

This book is designed to give you deeper insight into yourself and the most important aspects of your life—to help you get out of your own way, keep things in perspective, and focus on what truly matters to you. But most of all, it will help you to have more compassion, more acceptance, and more love for yourself—thus giving you access to more compassion, more acceptance, and more love for the people (and everything else) in your life.

While the stories in this book focus on me and people I know, the most important person in this book is you. Your relationship to yourself gives you the context for how you relate

INTRODUCTION

to everyone and everything around you. Unfortunately, most of the feedback you get about how to live your life comes from the expectations of others and/or of the culture or environment in which you live. And while these things and people are important and essential to life and growth, what's most essential is how you relate to and feel about yourself. Hopefully these stories will help you see your life in a new way.

I acknowledge you for picking up this book, which, in and of itself, is an act of self-love. I feel grateful, humbled, and honored to be embarking on this journey with you. Here we go . . .

CHAPTER 1

Focus on What Truly Matters

My mom, Lois Dempsey Robbins, was diagnosed with stage four lung cancer in early March of 2011. The disease spread very quickly and on June 13 of that same year, she passed away. I was with her through her dying process, and it was both horrible and beautiful at the same time.

It was difficult for me to see my mom's physical deterioration and how much pain she was in. I also struggled with the realization that she was going to die and that at 37 years old I would be without either of my parents (my dad died in 2001), and my girls would grow up without their grandma, who absolutely adored them.

However, there were some amazing moments as well. About a week before she died, my mom and I were sitting on her bed talking. She was already starting to fade in and out, but in a clear and lucid moment, she looked at me and said in a hushed tone, "I'm sorry I didn't teach you more, Mike." I was a bit surprised to hear her say this; my mom wasn't big on apologies or vulnerability, although in that final month or so she really softened and opened up in beautiful ways. "That's okay, Mom," I replied. "You taught me more than enough." After a pause I added, "Sorry I was

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such a pain in the ass sometimes.” She looked at me and said, through a laugh, “It’s okay; that’s what you were supposed to do.” We both laughed and cried a little, but mostly laughed. Our relationship had its challenges over the years, but in that moment, we connected in a very real way.

This type of closeness, and the family connection, deep conversations, healing, insights, love, forgiveness, and support were some of the most wonderful things I experienced in the days and weeks before and after her death.

My mom’s diagnosis, illness, and passing caused me to look more deeply at the things and people in my life that matter most—as is often the case when we go through a traumatic event. Through this challenge, I was given perspective and awareness.

What I noticed is that, sadly, I don’t focus on what and who truly matter to me as much as I’d like. I often get distracted by fears, ego-obsessions, drama (in my own life and in the world), ambitions, and all sorts of survival instincts and emotional reactions. While I understand that this is all part of being human, I also recognize that when I get distracted like this, I’m not able to fully engage in the most important parts of my life.

Why do we get so distracted? Why does it sometimes take illness, crisis, injury, tragedy, or even death to wake us up and get our attention?

I think we clutter up our lives with too much “stuff.” We’re so busy, overcommitted, and information-obsessed. Our never-ending to-do lists are long and we run around trying to “keep up” or “be important,” and in the process stress ourselves out. Even though many of us, myself included, often complain that we can’t do anything about this—based on the nature of life today, technology, or our responsibilities, families, and jobs—most of us have more

of a say over our schedules than we admit. We can choose how much we engage in electronic communication or the amount of “stuff” we cram into our daily lives. Much of this distracts us from what’s most important and keeps us from feeling our true emotions, which is one of the reasons we keep ourselves so busy and distracted in the first place.

It can be a little scary to focus on what truly matters. Some of the most important people, activities, and aspects of our lives may seem unimportant to those around us, and may or may not have anything to do with our careers or taking care of our families. Some of these may not even be things that other people like, understand, or agree with. Even if they are, sadly, it’s often easier to just watch TV, check our e-mail, clean our house, plan our day, surf the Internet, and merely react to what’s going on around us than to actively engage in the things we value most.

We also may not actually know what’s most important to us, or we at least have some internal struggle about what should be. With so many conflicting beliefs, ideas, expectations, and agendas within and around us, it’s not always easy to know with certainty what matters most to us. And, even if we do, it can take a good deal of strength to live in alignment with this on a regular basis. Whether it’s our lack of clarity or our fear of letting other people down (or maybe a bit of both), focusing on what truly matters to us can be more tricky than it seems on the surface.

While these and other “reasons” make sense, not focusing on what matters most to us has a real and often negative impact on our lives, our work, and everyone around us. We end up living in a way that is out of synch with who we really are, which causes stress, dissatisfaction, and missed opportunities and experiences.

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What if we did focus on what truly mattered all the time—not simply because we experience a wake-up call, crisis, or major life change, but because we choose to in a proactive way? What would your life look like if you let go of some of your biggest distractions, the often meaningless worries and stresses that take your attention, and actually put more focus on the people and things that are most important to you?

One of the most profound things my mom said before she died was, “I want people to know that they don’t have to suffer through this.” As the end was getting closer, my mom’s desire to share her wisdom increased, and it was beautiful. Because I was more focused on what mattered and less distracted by my own busyness, worries, to-do list, and even my judgments, I was actually able to pay more attention to her and really listen to the wisdom she had to share, which was such a gift.

Here are some of the key lessons I learned from my mom as she began to surrender and open up in the final days of her life. These are simple (although not easy) reminders for each of us:

Express Yourself—Say what you have to say; don’t hold things back. As my mom got closer to death, she began to express herself with a deeper level of authenticity and transparency. We had conversations about things we’d never talked about before and she opened up in ways that were both liberating and inspiring. Too often in life, we hold back because we’re afraid of rejection, judgment, and alienation. Expressing ourselves is about letting go of our limiting filters and living life “out loud.”

Forgive—My mom and I come from a long line of grudge holders. Like me, she could hold a grudge with the

best of 'em. I watched as she began to consciously and unconsciously let go of her grudges and resentments, both big and small. It was as if she was saying, "Who cares?" When you only have a few months (or weeks) to live, the idea that "life's too short" becomes more than a bumper sticker; it's a reality. And, with this reality, the natural thing for us to do is to forgive those around us—and ourselves.

Live with Passion—Going for it, being bold, and living our lives with a genuine sense of passion is so important. However, it's easy to get caught up in our concerns or to worry what other people will think about us. My mom, who was a pretty passionate woman throughout her life, began to live with an even deeper level of passion, although her body was deteriorating. In her final days and weeks, she engaged everyone in conversation, talked about what she loved, shared grandiose ideas, and let go of many of her concerns about the opinions of others. It was amazing—such a great model and reminder of the importance of passion.

Share Your Appreciation—At one point, my mom said, "It's so important to appreciate people . . . I don't know why I haven't done more of that in my life." Even in the midst of all she was going through, she went out of her way to let people know what she appreciated about them—and people shared their appreciation with her as well. My friend Janae set up a "joy line" for people to call and leave voice messages for my mom in her final days. We got close to 50 of the most beautiful messages, all expressing love and appreciation for my mom—most of which we were able to play for her before she passed away. Appreciation is the greatest gift we can give to others, and we don't have to

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wait until we're dying to do it or until someone else is dying to let them know!

Surrender—While my mom clearly wasn't happy about dying, something happened about a month and a half before she died that was truly remarkable—she surrendered. For my mom, who had a very strong will and was a fighter by nature, this probably wasn't easy. However, watching her surrender to what was happening and embrace the process of dying was truly inspirational and life altering for those of us around her—and for her as well. So much of the beauty, healing, and transformation that occurred for her and for us during her dying process was a function of surrendering. Not giving up, giving in, or selling out, but making peace with what is and choosing to embrace life (and in this case death) as it shows up. Our ability to surrender in life is directly related to the amount of peace and fulfillment we experience.

My mom taught me and all of us that even in the face of death, it's possible to experience joy—what a gift and a great lesson and legacy to leave behind. We don't have to wait until painful things happen in our lives to wake us up—we can practice observing what we're paying attention to and asking ourselves the simple but important question, *Does this truly matter?*

If you'd like to connect with me personally, get more information about my work, attend one of my events, bring me in to speak to your group, and/or utilize the resources on my website, feel free to visit www.Mike-Robbins.com.

You can also connect with me on Facebook, www.facebook.com/mikerobbinspage, and Twitter, @MikeDRobbins.

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About the Author

Mike Robbins is the author of *Focus on the Good Stuff* and *Be Yourself, Everyone Else Is Already Taken*, which have been translated into 14 languages. He's a sought-after speaker who delivers keynotes and seminars around the world. Mike works with people, teams, and organizations, empowering them to appreciate themselves and each other, be real, work well together, produce results with ease, and keep things in perspective. His clients include some of the top organizations in the world, such as Google, Wells Fargo, Adobe, Gap, the U.S. Department of Labor, Charles Schwab, Twitter, the San Francisco Giants, eBay, and many more. Mike is a member of the National Speakers Association and one of less than 10 percent of the professional speakers worldwide to have earned the prestigious Certified Speaking Professional (CSP) designation.

Prior to his writing and speaking career, Mike was drafted by the New York Yankees out of high school, but chose instead to play baseball at Stanford University, where he pitched in the College World Series. After college, he played baseball professionally in the Kansas City Royals organization, until an injury ended his career while he was still in the minor leagues. He's been a regular contributor to *The Huffington Post* since 2008, and his work has been featured on *ABC News*, the Oprah radio network, *The Washington Post*, and many other media outlets.

Nothing Changes *Until You Do*

Mike lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with his wife, Michelle, and their two daughters, Samantha and Rosie.

To learn more about Mike and his work, visit www.Mike-Robbins.com. You can also connect with him on Facebook (www.facebook.com/mikerobbinspage) and Twitter (@MikeDRobbins).

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