

The Idealist: INFP

As an INFP, your primary mode of living is focused internally, where you deal with things according to how you feel about them, or how they fit into your personal value system. Your secondary mode is external, where you take things in primarily via your intuition.

INFPs, more than other iNtuitive Feeling types, are focused on making the world a better place for people. Their primary goal is to find out their meaning in life. What is their purpose? How can they best serve humanity in their lives? They are idealists and perfectionists, who drive themselves hard in their quest for achieving the goals they have identified for themselves.

INFPs are highly intuitive about people. They rely heavily on their intuitions to guide them, and use their discoveries to constantly search for value in life. They are on a continuous mission to find the truth and meaning underlying things. Every encounter and every piece of knowledge gained gets sifted through the INFP's value system, and is evaluated to see if it has any potential to help the INFP define or refine their own path in life. The goal at the end of the path is always the same - the INFP is driven to help people and make the world a better place.

Generally thoughtful and considerate, INFPs are good listeners and put people at ease. Although they may be reserved in expressing emotion, they have a very deep well of caring and are genuinely interested in understanding people. This sincerity is sensed by others, making the INFP a valued friend and confidante. An INFP can be quite warm with people he or she knows well.

INFPs do not like conflict, and go to great lengths to avoid it. If they must face it, they will always approach it from the perspective of their feelings. In conflict situations, INFPs place little importance on who is right and who is wrong. They focus on the way that the conflict makes them feel, and indeed don't really care whether or not they're right. They don't want to feel badly. This trait sometimes makes them appear irrational and illogical in conflict situations. On the other hand, INFPs make very good mediators, and are typically good at solving other people's conflicts, because they intuitively understand people's perspectives and feelings, and genuinely want to help them.

INFPs are flexible and laid-back, until one of their values is violated. In the face of their value system being threatened, INFPs can become aggressive defenders, fighting passionately for their cause. When an INFP has adopted a project or job which they're interested in, it usually becomes a "cause" for them. Although they are not detail-oriented individuals, they will cover every possible detail with determination and vigor when working for their "cause".

When it comes to the mundane details of life maintenance, INFPs are typically completely unaware of such things. They might go for long periods without noticing a stain on the carpet, but carefully and meticulously brush a speck of dust off of their project booklet.

INFPs do not like to deal with hard facts and logic. Their focus on their feelings and the Human Condition makes it difficult for them to deal with impersonal judgment. They don't understand or believe in the validity of impersonal judgment, which makes them naturally rather ineffective at using it. Most INFPs will avoid impersonal analysis, although some have developed this ability and are able to be quite logical. Under stress, it's not uncommon for INFPs to mis-use hard logic in the heat of anger, throwing out fact after (often inaccurate) fact in an emotional outburst.

INFPs have very high standards and are perfectionists. Consequently, they are usually hard on themselves, and don't give themselves enough credit. INFPs may have problems working on a project in a group, because their standards are likely to be higher than other members' of the group. In group situations, they may have a "control" problem. The INFP needs to work on balancing their high ideals with the requirements of every day living. Without resolving this conflict, they will never be happy with themselves, and they may become confused and paralyzed about what to do with their lives.

INFPs are usually talented writers. They may be awkward and uncomfortable with expressing themselves verbally, but have a wonderful ability to define and express what they're feeling on paper. INFPs also appear frequently in social service professions, such as counselling or teaching. They are at their best in situations where they're working towards the public good, and in which they don't need to use hard logic.

INFPs who function in their well-developed sides can accomplish great and wonderful things, which they will rarely give themselves credit for. Some of the great, humanistic catalysts in the world have been INFPs.

Jungian functional preference ordering:

Dominant: Introverted Feeling
Auxiliary: Extraverted Intuition
Tertiary: Introverted Sensing
Inferior: Extraverted Thinking

INFP Relationships

INFPs present a calm, pleasant face to the world. They appear to be tranquil and peaceful to others, with simple desires. In fact, the INFP internally feels his or her life intensely. In the relationship arena, this causes them to have a very deep capacity for love and caring which is not frequently found with such intensity in the other types. The INFP does not devote their intense feelings towards just anyone, and are relatively reserved about expressing their inner-most feelings. They reserve their deepest love and caring for a select few who are closest to them. INFPs are generally laid-back, supportive and nurturing in their close relationships. With Introverted Feeling dominating their personality, they're very sensitive and in-tune with people's feelings, and feel genuine concern and caring for others. Slow to trust others and cautious in the beginning of a relationship, an INFP will be fiercely loyal once they are committed. With their strong inner core of values, they are intense individuals who value depth and authenticity in their relationships, and hold those who understand and accept the INFP's perspectives in especially high regard. INFPs are usually adaptable and congenial, unless one of their ruling principles has been violated, in which case they stop adapting and become staunch defenders of their values. They will be uncharacteristically harsh and rigid in such a situation.

INFP Strengths

Most INFPs will exhibit the following strengths with regards to relationship issues:

- * Warmly concerned and caring towards others
- * Sensitive and perceptive about what others are feeling
- * Loyal and committed - they want lifelong relationships
- * Deep capacity for love and caring
- * Driven to meet other's needs
- * Strive for "win-win" situations
- * Nurturing, supportive and encouraging
- * Likely to recognize and appreciate other's need for space
- * Able to express themselves well
- * Flexible and diverse

INFP Weaknesses

Most INFPs will exhibit the following weaknesses with regards to relationship issues:

- * May tend to be shy and reserved
- * Don't like to have their "space" invaded
- * Extreme dislike of conflict
- * Extreme dislike of criticism
- * Strong need to receive praise and positive affirmation
- * May react very emotionally to stressful situations
- * Have difficulty leaving a bad relationship
- * Have difficulty scolding or punishing others
- * Tend to be reserved about expressing their feelings
- * Perfectionistic tendencies may cause them to not give themselves enough credit
- * Tendency to blame themselves for problems, and hold everything on their own shoulders

INFPs as Lovers

"To love means to open ourselves to the negative as well as the positive - to grief, sorrow, and disappointment as well as to joy, fulfillment, and an intensity of consciousness we did not know was possible before." -- Rollo May

INFPs feel tremendous loyalty and commitment to their relationships. With the Feeling preference dominating their personality, harmony and warm feelings are central to the INFP's being. They feel a need to be in a committed, loving relationship. If they are not involved in such a relationship, the INFP will be either actively searching for one, or creating

one in their own minds.

INFPs tendency to be idealistic and romantically-minded may cause them to fantasize frequently about a "more perfect" relationship or situation. They may also romanticize their mates into having qualities which they do not actually possess. Most INFPs have a problem with reconciling their highly idealistic and romantic views of life with the reality of their own lives, and so they are constantly somewhat unsettled with themselves and with their close personal relationships. However, the INFP's deeply-felt, sincere love for their mates and their intense dislike of conflict keeps the INFP loyal to their relationships, in spite of their troubles achieving peace of mind.

Unlike other types who tend to hold their mates up on a pedestal, the INFP's tendency to do so does not really turn into a negative thing in the relationship. INFPs hold tightly to their ideals, and work hard at constantly seeing their mates up on that pedestal. The frequent INFP result is a strongly affirming, proud and affectionate attitude towards their mates which stands the test of time.

INFPs are not naturally interested in administrative matters such as bill-paying and house-cleaning, but they can be very good at performing these tasks when they must. They can be really good money managers when they apply themselves.

One real problem area for the INFP is their intensive dislike of conflict and criticism. The INFP is quick to find a personal angle in any critical comment, whether or not anything personal was intended. They will tend to take any sort of criticism as a personal attack on their character, and will usually become irrational and emotional in such situations. This can be a real problem for INFPs who are involved with persons who have Thinking and Judging preferences. "TJ"s relate to others with a objective, decisive attitude that frequently shows an opinion on the topic of conversation. If the opinion is negative, the TJ's attitude may be threatening to the INFP, who will tend to respond emotionally to the negativity and be vaguely but emphatically convinced that the negativity is somehow the INFP's fault.

For INFPs with extremely dominant Feeling preferences who have not developed their Intuitive sides sufficiently to gather good data for their decision making processes, their dislike of conflict and criticism can foretell doom and gloom for intimate relationships. These INFPs will react with extreme emotional distress to conflict situations, and will not know what to do about it. Since they will have no basis for determining what action to take, they will do whatever they can to get rid of the conflict - which frequently means lashing out irrationally at others, or using guilt manipulation to get their mates to give them the positive support that they crave. This kind of behavior does not bode well for healthy, long-term relationships. Individuals who recognize this tendency in themselves should work on their ability to take criticism objectively rather than personally. They should also try to remember that conflict situations are not always their fault, and they're definitely not the end of the world. Conflict is a fact of life, and facing it and addressing it immediately avoids having to deal with it in the future, after it has become a much larger problem.

INFPs are very aware of their own space, and the space of others. They value their personal space, and the freedom to do their own thing. They will cherish the mate who sees the INFP for who they are, and respects their unique style and perspectives. The INFP is not likely to be overly jealous or possessive, and is likely to respect their mate's privacy and independence. In fact, the INFP is likely to not only respect their mate's perspectives and goals, but to support them with loyal firmness.

In general, INFPs are warmly affirming and loving partners who make the health of their relationships central in their lives. Although cautious in the beginning, they become firmly loyal to their committed relationships, which are likely to last a lifetime. They take their relationships very seriously, and will put forth a great deal of effort into making them work.

Although two well-developed individuals of any type can enjoy a healthy relationship, INFP's natural partner is the ENFJ, or the ESFJ. INFP's dominant function of Introverted Feeling is best matched with a partner whose dominant function is Extraverted Feeling. The INFP/ENFJ combination is ideal, because it shares the Sensing way of peceiving, but the INFP/ESFJ combination is also a good match. How did we arrive at this?

INFPs as Parents

"You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth...
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;
For even as He loves the arrow that flies,

so He loves also the bow that is stable." -- Kahlil Gibran

INFPs are "natural" parents. They accept and enjoy the parental role, seeing it as the natural extension of their value systems. They make use of the parental role for developing and defining their values further, and consider it their task to pass their values on to their children. They take their role quite seriously. Warm, affirming, and flexible, the INFP generally makes a gentle and easy-going parent in many respects.

INFPs do not like conflict situations, and will keep themselves flexible and diverse to promote a positive, conflict-free environment in their home. The INFP is not naturally prone to dole out punishment or discipline, and so is likely to adapt to their mate's disciplinary policy, or to rely on their mates to administer discipline with the children. In the absence of a mating parent, the INFP will need to make a conscious effort of creating a structure for their children to live within.

Although the INFP dislikes punishing others, they hold strong values and will not tolerate the violation of a strongly-held belief. If they feel that their child has truly committed a wrong, the INFP parent will not have a problem administering discipline. They will directly confront the child, stubbornly digging in their heels and demanding recourse.

The INFP parent is likely to value their children as individuals, and to give them room for growth. They will let the children have their own voice and place in the family.

Extremely loving and devoted parents, INFPs will fiercely protect and support their children. If there is an issue involving "taking sides", you can bet the INFP will always be loyal to their children.

INFPs are usually remembered by their children as loving, patient, devoted, and flexible parents.

INFPs as Friends

INFPs are warm and caring individuals who highly value authenticity and depth in their personal relationships. They are usually quite perceptive about other people's feelings and motives, and are consequently able to get along with all sorts of different people. However, the INFP will keep their true selves reserved from others except for a select few, with whom they will form close and lasting friendships. With their high ideals, they are likely to be drawn to other iNtuitive Feelers for their closer friendships.

With their strong need for harmony and dislike of conflict, INFPs may feel threatened by people with strong Judging and Thinking preferences. Although they're likely to be able to work well professionally with such individuals, they may have difficulty accepting or appreciating them on a personal level. They generally feel a kinship and affinity with other Feeling types.

INFPs will be valued by their confidantes as genuine, altruistic, deep, caring, original individuals.

What does Success mean to an INFP?

INFPs are creative, sensitive souls who take their lives very seriously. They seek harmony and authenticity in their relationships with others. They value creativity, spirituality, and honoring the individual self above all else. They are very tuned into inequity and unfairness against people, and get great satisfaction from conquering such injustices. An INFP is a perfectionist who will rarely allow themselves to feel successful, although they will be keenly aware of failures. INFPs also get satisfaction from being in touch with their creativity. For the INFP, personal success depends upon the condition of their closest relationships, the development of their creative abilities, and the continual support of humanity by serving people in need, fighting against injustice, or in some other way working to make the world a better place to be.

Allowing Your INFP Strengths to Flourish

As an INFP, you have gifts that are specific to your personality type that aren't natural strengths for other types. By recognizing your special gifts and encouraging their growth and development, you will more readily see your place in the world, and how you can better use your talents to achieve your dreams.

Nearly all INFPs will recognize the following characteristics in themselves. They should embrace and nourish these strengths:

- * Highly creative, artistic and spiritual, they can produce wonderful works of art, music and literature. INFPs are natural artists. They will find great satisfaction if they encourage and develop their artistic abilities. That doesn't mean that an INFP has to be a famous writer or painter in order to be content. Simply the act of "creating" will be a fulfilling source of renewal and refreshment to the INFP. An INFP should allow himself or herself some artistic outlet, because it will add enrichment and positive energy to their life.

- * They're more spiritually aware than most people, and are more in touch with their soul than others. Most INFPs have strong Faith. Those that don't may feel as if they're missing something important. An INFP should nourish their faith.

- * INFPs are very aware of social injustice, and empathize with the underdog. Their empathy for the underdog and hyper-awareness of social injustice makes them extremely compassionate and nurturing towards disadvantaged members of our society. INFPs will feel most useful and fulfilled when they are fighting to help people who have been misfortunate in our society. They may be teachers, ministers, writers, counsellors or psychologists, but they will most likely all spend extra time trying to help people with special problems. An INFP can find a tremendous amount of satisfaction by enacting some kind of social change that will help the underdog.

- * They're usually good listeners who genuinely want to hear about someone's problems, and genuinely want to help them. This makes them outstanding counsellors, and good friends. An INFP may find great satisfaction from volunteering as a counselor.

- * They accept and value people as individuals, and are strongly egalitarian. They believe that an individual has the right to be themselves, without having their attitudes and perspectives brought under scrutiny. Accordingly, they have a great deal of tolerance and acceptance dealing with people who might encounter negative judgment from society in general. They can see something positive in everyone. They believe in individuals. If they give themselves the opportunity, an INFP can become a much-needed source of self-esteem and confidence for people who cannot find it on their own. In this way, they can nurture a "sick soul" back to health.

- * Usually deep and intelligent, they're able to grasp difficult concepts with relative ease. They usually do quite well academically, and will find that educating their minds nourishes their need to think deeply.

INFPs who have developed their Extraverted iNtuition to the extent that they can perceive the world about them objectively and quickly will find that they enjoy these very special gifts:

- * They will have a great deal of insight into people's characters. They will quickly and thoroughly understand where a person is coming from by assessing their motives and feelings. These well-developed INFP individuals make outstanding psychologists (such as Isabel Briggs Myers herself) and counselors. They might also be great fiction writers, because they're able to develop very complex, real characters.

- * They will quickly understand different situations, and quickly grasp new concepts. They will find that they're able to do anything that they put their mind to, although they may not find it personally satisfying. Things may seem to come easily to these INFPs. Although they're able to conquer many different kinds of tasks and situations, these INFPs will be happiest doing something that seems truly important to them. Although they may find that they can achieve the "mainstream" type of success with relative ease, they are not likely to find happiness along that path, unless they are living their lives with authenticity and depth.

- * The INFP who augments their strong, internal value system (Introverted Feeling) with a well-developed intuitive way of perceiving the world (Extraverted iNtuition) can be a powerful force for social change. Their intense values and strong empathy for the underprivileged, combined with a reliable and deeply insightful understanding of the world that we live in, creates an individual with the power to make a difference (such as Mother Teresa - an INFP).

Potential Problem Areas

With any gift of strength, there is an associated weakness. Without "bad", there would be no "good". Without "difficult", there would be no "easy". We value our strengths, but we often curse and ignore our weaknesses. To grow as a person and get what we want out of life, we must not only capitalize upon our strengths, but also face our

weaknesses and deal with them. That means taking a hard look at our personality type's potential problem areas.

INFPs are rare, intelligent, creative beings with many special gifts. I would like for the INFP to keep in mind some of the many positive things associated with being an INFP as they read some of this more negative material. Also remember that the weaknesses associated with being an INFP are natural to your type. Although it may be depressing to read about your type's weaknesses, please remember that we offer this information to enact positive change. We want people to grow into their own potential, and to live happy and successful lives.

Most of the weaker characteristics that are found in INFPs are due to their dominant Feeling function overshadowing the rest of their personality. When the dominant function of Introverted Feeling overshadows everything else, the INFP can't use Extraverted iNtuition to take in information in a truly objective fashion. In such cases, an INFP may show some or all of the following weaknesses in varying degrees:

- * May be extremely sensitive to any kind of criticism
- * May perceive criticism where none was intended
- * May have skewed or unrealistic ideas about reality
- * May be unable to acknowledge or hear anything that goes against their personal ideas and opinions
- * May blame their problems on other people, seeing themselves as victims who are treated unfairly
- * May have great anger, and show this anger with rash outpourings of bad temper
- * May be unaware of appropriate social behavior
- * May be oblivious to their personal appearance, or to appropriate dress
- * May come across as eccentric, or perhaps even generally strange to others, without being aware of it
- * May be unable to see or understand anyone else's point of view
- * May value their own opinions and feelings far above others
- * May be unaware of how their behavior affects others
- * May be oblivious to other people's need
- * May feel overwhelmed with tension and stress when someone expresses disagreement with the INFP, or disapproval of the INFP
- * May develop strong judgments that are difficult to unseed against people who they perceive have been oppressive or suppressive to them
- * Under great stress, may obsess about details that are unimportant to the big picture of things
- * Under stress, may obsessively brood over a problem repeatedly
- * May have unreasonable expectations of others
- * May have difficulty maintaining close relationships, due to unreasonable expectations

Explanation of Problems

Nearly all of the problematic characteristics described above can be attributed in various degrees to the common INFP problem of only taking in data that justifies their personal opinions. INFPs are usually very intense and sensitive people, and feel seriously threatened by criticism. They are likely to treat any point of view other than their own as criticism of their own perspective. If the INFP does not learn how to deal with this perceived criticism, the INFP will begin to shut out the incoming information that causes them pain. This is a natural survivalistic technique for the INFP personality. The main driver to the INFP personality is Introverted Feeling, whose purpose is to maintain and honor an intensely personal system of values and morals. If an INFP's personal value system is threatened by external influences, the INFP shuts out the threatening data in order to preserve and honor their value system. This is totally natural, and works well to protect the individual psyche from getting hurt. However, the INFP who exercises this type of self-protection regularly will become more and more unaware of other people's perspectives, and thus more and more isolated from a real understanding of the world that they live in. They will always find justification for their own inappropriate behaviors, and will always find fault with the external world for problems that they have in their lives. It will be difficult for them to maintain close personal relationships because they will have unreasonable expectations, and will be unable to accept blame.

It's not an uncommon tendency for the INFP to look to the external world primarily for information that will support their ideas and values. However, if this tendency is given free reign, the resulting INFP personality is too self-centered to be happy or successful. Since the INFP's dominant function to their personality is Introverted Feeling, they must balance this with an auxiliary Extraverted iNtuitive function. The INFP takes in information via Extraverted iNtuition. This is also the INFP's primary way of dealing with the external world. If the INFP uses Extraverted iNtuition only to

serve the purposes of Introverted Feeling, then the INFP is not using Extraversion effectively at all. As a result, the INFP does not take in enough information about the external world to have a good sense of what's going on. They see nothing but their own perspective, and deal with the world only so far as they need to in order to support their perspective. These individuals usually come across as selfish and unrealistic. Depending on how serious the problem is, they may appear to be anything from "a bit eccentric" to "way out there". Many times other people are unable to understand or relate to these people.

Solutions

To grow as an individual, the INFP needs to focus on opening their perspective to include a more accurate picture of what is really going on in the world. In order to be in a position in which the INFP is able to perceive and consider data that is foreign to their internal value system, the INFP needs to know that its value system is not threatened by the new information. The INFP must consciously tell himself/herself that an opinion that does not concede with their own is not an indictment of their entire character.

The INFP who is concerned with personal growth will pay close attention to their motivation for taking in information. Do they take in information to better understand a situation or concept? Or, do they take in information to support a personal idea or cause? At the moment when something is perceived, is the INFP concerned with twisting that perception to fit in with their personal values? Or is she/he concerned with absorbing the information objectively? To achieve a better understanding of the external world, the INFP should try to perceive information objectively, before fitting it into their value system. They should consciously be aware of their tendency to discard anything that doesn't agree with their values, and work towards lessening this tendency. They should try to see situations from other people's perspectives, without making personal judgments about the situations or the other people's perspectives. In general, they should work on exercising their iNtuition in a truly Extraverted sense. In other words, they should use iNtuition to take in information about the world around them for the sake of understanding the world, rather than take in information to support their own conclusions. The INFP who successfully perceives things objectively may be quite a powerful force for positive change.

Living Happily in our World as an INFP

Some INFPs have difficulty fitting into our society. Their problems are often a result of an unawareness of appropriate social behavior, an unawareness of how they come across to others, or unrealistic expectations of others. Any one of these three issues stem from using Extraverted iNtuition in a diminished manner. An INFP who takes in information for the sake of understanding the world around them, rather than one who takes in information only to support their own ideas, will have a clearer, more objective understanding of how society values social behaviors and attitudes. He or she will also be more aware of how they are perceived by others, and will have more realistic expectations for others' behavior within a relationship. Such well-adjusted INFPs will fit happily into our society.

Unless you really understand Psychological Type and the nuances of the various personality functions, it's a difficult task to suddenly start to use iNtuition in an Extraverted direction. It's difficult to even understand what that means, much less to incorporate that directive into your life. With that in mind, I am providing some specific suggestions that may help you to begin exercising your Extraverted iNtuition more fully:

- * Take care to notice what people look like in different social situations. Look at their hair, their skin, their makeup (or lack thereof), their clothes, the condition of their clothes, their shoes, their facial expressions. Don't compare others to your own appearance, or pass judgment on their appearance, simply take in the information.

- * Think of a situation in your life in which you weren't sure how to behave. Now try to understand how one or two other people would see the situation. Don't compare their behavior to your own, i.e. "she would know better than me what to do", or "why is it so easy for her, but so hard for me". Rather, try to understand how they would see the situation. Would it be seen as a problem, or as an opportunity? Would it be taken seriously or lightly? Try to determine their point of view without passing judgment or comparing it to your own.

- * When having a conversation with a friend or relative, dedicate at least half of your time to talking about the other person. Concentrate on really understanding where that person is coming from with their concerns. Ask questions.

- * Think of the people who are closest to you. As you think of each person, tell yourself "this person has their

own life going on, and they are more concerned with their own life than they are with mine.” Remember that this doesn’t mean that they don’t care about you. It’s the natural order of things. Try to visualize what that person is doing right now. What things are they encountering, what thoughts are they having? Don’t pass judgment, or compare their situation to your own.

* Try to identify the personality type of everyone that you come into contact with for any length of time.

Ten Rules to Live By to Achieve INFP Success

1. **Feed Your Strengths!** Encourage your natural artistic abilities and creativity. Nourish your spirituality. Give yourself opportunities to help the needy or underprivileged.

2. **Face Your Weaknesses!** Realize and accept that some traits are strengths and some are weaknesses. Facing and dealing with your weaknesses doesn’t mean that you have to change who you are, it means that you want to be the best You possible. By facing your weaknesses, you are honoring your true self, rather than attacking yourself.

3. **Express Your Feelings.** Don’t let unexpressed emotions build up inside of you. If you have strong feelings, sort them out and express them, Don’t let them build up inside you to the point where they become unmanageable!

4. **Listen to Everything.** Try not to dismiss anything immediately. Let everything soak in for awhile, then apply judgment.

5. **Smile at Criticism.** Remember that people will not always agree with you or understand you, even if they value you greatly. Try to see disagreement and criticism as an opportunity for growth. In fact, that is exactly what it is.

6. **Be Aware of Others.** Remember that there are 15 other personality types out there who see things differently than you see them. Try to identify other people’s types. Try to understand their perspectives.

7. **Be Accountable for Yourself.** Remember that YOU have more control over your life than any other person has.

8. **Be Gentle in Your Expectations.** You will always be disappointed with others if you expect too much of them. Being disappointed with another person is the best way to drive them away. Treat others with the same gentleness that you would like to be treated with.

9. **Assume the Best.** Don’t distress yourself by assuming the worst. Remember that a positive attitude often creates positive situations.

10. **When in Doubt, Ask Questions!** Don’t assume that the lack of feedback is the same thing as negative feedback. If you need feedback and don’t have any, ask for it.

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