

PLAY FOR PERFORMANCE: November 2003

SERIOUSLY FUN ACTIVITIES FOR TRAINERS, FACILITATORS, PERFORMANCE CONSULTANTS, AND MANAGERS.

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**PLAY FOR PERFORMANCE:
SERIOUSLY FUN ACTIVITIES FOR TRAINERS, FACILITATORS, PERFORMANCE
CONSULTANTS, AND MANAGERS.**

Mission

To increase and improve the use of interactive, experiential strategies to improve human performance in an effective, efficient, and enjoyable way.

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Feedback Request

Thiagi believes in practicing what he preaches. This is an interactive newsletter, so interact already! Send us your feedback, sarcastic remarks, and gratuitous advice through email to thiagi@thiagi.com . Thanks!

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Editorial

Open Questions

While reviewing a training game on team formation, I came across this question:

What are the four stages of team development?

You probably know the answer: *forming, storming, norming, and performing*.

If you answered the question correctly, what does it prove? Sure, you can recall the four stages of team development. But does this mean that you understand the principles and can apply them to real-world teams?

Compare the original question with these questions:

- What is an example of effective facilitation behavior during the norming stage?
- What is an example of effective team-member behavior during the storming stage?
- Which team-development stage is the most critical one? Why do you think so?
- What additional stages would you add to the four team-development stages?

These questions require (and reward) higher-order thinking. They challenge participants. They require a deeper understanding of the principles. They are intellectually stimulating.

Unfortunately, however, the questions that are most frequently used in training games resemble the original question. They are closed, convergent that questions fall in the *one-correct-answer* category. They are recall questions that require the lowest levels of thinking. They are meaningless, impersonal, mechanical questions that patronize the learner by asking her to determine if a statement is true or to select the best answer among four insipid alternatives.

Why is this type of closed question so frequently used in training activities? Because it is easy to determine whether the answer is correct or not, because the answers can be evaluated by any player, and because you can program a computer to check the answer.

The use of closed questions conveys a strong impression that players are incapable of producing or recognizing creative responses to open-ended questions.

Don't get me wrong. I believe recall questions are very important. Beginning learners should master the fundamental facts, figures, terminology, and definitions. They should practice these items until they acquire the required level of fluency.

But I am bothered by the perception that games and interactive exercises are effective

only for drill practice. Most trainers and participants and managers believe that games are limited to the basic knowledge and comprehension. These perceptions are reinforced by the trivial questions that are incorporated in most instructional games. For example, people look at this question

By what percent did the Asian population in the U.S. grow in the decade 1980 to 1990?

and wonder what that has to do with the skills of getting along with a coworker from a different culture.

For the past 30 years, I have designed and used games with open-ended, divergent questions that require application, analysis, evaluation, problem solving, and synthesis. My secret? A fundamental belief that the players are capable of comparing different responses and deciding which one is the best. Also, a belief that by comparatively judging other players' responses, you master the criteria for effective responses and learn to apply them to your own responses. Recently, I have been using open question in my online learning course. Even in the absence of feedback from an expert facilitator, participants are more engaged in their learning activities.

Here's a closed question for you: *Is it time for you to start using open-ended questions in your training activities?* Give yourself 1 point if you answered "Yes". Here's an open-ended question: *What strategies can we use for encouraging players to produce and recognize creative responses?* Decide for yourself how many points you deserve.

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Opener

WORKING THE ROOM

A major purpose of an opening activity is to help participants get acquainted with each other. Here's an opener that identifies and rewards participants who would make good politicians.

Purpose

To energize participants and to encourage interaction among them.

Time

15 - 20 minutes

Participants

10 to 30

Preparation

Prepare copies of an instruction sheet presenting the following content with suitable modifications:

Working-the-Room Contest!

We want you to meet and interact with as many other participants as possible.

This is a do-it-yourself icebreaker. You have approximately 7 minutes between now and 8:37 AM to mingle and chat with the other participants. Collect information from different people and share information about yourself. Use this contest as an excuse to behave like an intrusive extrovert.

Until 8:37, you are on your own. No other instructions will be given.

Exactly at 8:37, we will conduct a contest that will reward your ability to work the room. You will have two chances to win!

Flow

Briefing. As participants come in, greet them at the door and give them a copy of the instruction sheet. If anyone asks you questions about the contest, repeat the information from the instruction sheet.

Keeping time. Blow a whistle and announce the beginning of the 7-minute period. Keep an eye on the clock. One minute before the ending time of the contest, give an appropriate warning.

Start the contest. At the exact time, blow the whistle. Tell participants to stop talking

with each other. Ask participants to hide their nametags and any other personal identification.

Conduct the popularity contest. Explain that the first phase of the contest involves visibility. Ask participants to stand up if they believe that their name will be remembered by the most people in the room. Bring this group to the front of the room. Point to the first contestant and ask the other participants to write her full name on a piece of paper. Announce the name of the participant and ask each participant to check the name written by her neighbor. Ask those who wrote the correct name to stand up, and count their number. Repeat the process with each of the other contestants. Identify the winner (or the winners) whose name was correctly written by the most other participants.

Begin the memory contest. Explain that the second phase of the contest involves memory. Ask participants to look around the room and estimate how many others they can name. Start an auction, asking participants to bid the number of full names that they recall correctly. Identify the highest bidder (or bidders).

Conduct the memory contest. Ask the highest bidder to go around the room, whispering (to prevent the others from hearing) the full names of each participant. Ask all participants who have been correctly named to stand up. If the highest bidder has succeeded in correctly naming the number of participants she bid (or exceeded the number), she wins. Otherwise, repeat the activity with the second highest bidder.

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Guest Gamer

This column features interviews with outstanding designers and users of interactive experiential activities. This month's guest gamer is Tatiana Kolovou who modestly describes herself as a resident alien with a passion for training.

An Interview with Tatiana Kolovou

Thiagi: Tatiana, how did you get into this field?

Tatiana: I came to the U.S. from Athens, Greece in 1984 to attend a large university. My upbringing and education (not to mention my accent) up to that point were quite different than the norms in this country, which immediately made me “neat to meet” according to my new friends.

I began to develop an interest in the field of Organizational Development during my MBA coursework, and became a fully engaged learner during the final simulation project that we were assigned. Prior to that I had completed a degree in Exercise Science where I quickly got involved in training fitness participants to develop healthy habits. Later I supervised a staff of fitness instructors and was responsible for teaching them new skills. In my opinion, the continuum of development spanning from the physical to the mental and applies both to individuals and organizations. The field of health and fitness has shown me that people learn a skill better when they actively experience it, and will retain a skill only when they have a chance to practice it. I have based all my interactive activity designs on this principle, and I continue to challenge myself by teaching fitness classes. I find that it keeps my brain sharp, playful, and one step ahead of the others in the room.

Thiagi: *What is your specialty area?*

Tatiana: I work in a large academic institution so I get the opportunity to design training around a variety of topic areas. If you ask my colleagues they would tell you that intercultural communication and life balance skills such as time management, stress management, and managing your energy at work are my specialties.

Thiagi: *How did you get into designing and using games?*

Tatiana: Initially, when I worked in the health and fitness field, I was looking for ways to engage the staff in learning new skills either in group training sessions or in individual sessions. Later I discovered this wide and amazing field of interactive learning and fell in love with it. Luckily, I also was able to make a career shift so I could be totally immersed in it.

Thiagi: *How long have you been using and designing games?*

Tatiana: For over 10 years...I figured that out only about 5 years ago.

Thiagi: *Where exactly do you use games?*

Tatiana: I try to incorporate some type of interactive experiential activity in everything that I do whether it is a seminar, a retreat, or an OD project.

Thiagi: How do your clients respond?

Tatiana: I try not to mention anything about playing a game when I am discussing objectives and outcomes with my clients (especially when it's our first interaction). Later, when they have experienced some of these practices in action, we discuss desired outcomes and they leave the process up to me.

Thiagi: How do your participants respond?

Tatiana: Everyone seems to really enjoy the learning process. The best compliment I get is that "time goes by fast". I try to stay in-tune with energy levels and use experiential activities when I foresee that they are most needed. In some cases I also use music to tap into the creative side of a group or enhance their mood.

Thiagi: What is the most horrible or embarrassing moment you had in conducting games?

Tatiana: Back in the days of slides as audiovisual aids, I was presenting at a conference held in several hotel meeting rooms. I had designed an interactive dialogue between pairs in a session where half of the people facing the front of the room were getting "special" instructions and responding accordingly. As I began the talk the slides kept changing without me once touching the remote. I had no control over the projector and couldn't stop the slides from advancing. Everyone, including me, had become totally distracted by it. Because I couldn't proceed without the information on the slides the activity failed. I thought I was in a re-run of *Poltergeist* until the presenter in the adjacent room peeked into mine with the most puzzled look on his face. Little did we know that the slide remote receivers had been switched and the same thing was happening next door. In the meantime I abandoned my brilliant activity but was able to re-convene after giving a short break.

Thiagi: What advice do you have to newcomers about designing and using games?

Tatiana: Prepare, prepare, prepare! Conducting the perfect game is a flow type of

experience. For you to be one step ahead of your participants while still being fully engaged in the process of their learning, you need to know your objectives, the process, the instructions, the debrief questions, and the key learning points. Preparation is both mental and physical. If you have colleagues or friends to practice with, take advantage of the opportunity. Even if your practice audience is limited to the stuffed animals in your child's room, you still need to go through the process of preparation.

Thiagi: How do you gain acceptance for the use of games?

Tatiana: When it comes to gaining acceptance from the audience, you have to be confident in yourself as the facilitator and be genuinely excited about the learning process you are about to use. You may also have to adapt your lingo according to your audience. "Now we are going to p _ _ _ a g _ _ _" may be the last words half of your audience heard that day!

Thiagi: What do you think is the most important characteristic of a facilitator, a participant, and an effective training game?

Tatiana: For the facilitator, the ability to let go of control and leave learning up to the "Gods of Play" when it comes to interactive activities. It is important to be organized but you must always be comfortable with some level of chaos.

For a participant, the ability to be present in the learning moment and to participate without being influenced by the fear of looking foolish in front of others is one of the most important characteristic.

You have to think of variations in your participants' learning styles and how this diversity will influence the game.

Thiagi: What are some of the things that you dislike?

Tatiana: I dislike facilitators who load the training session with too much content. This type of training becomes an "information dump." Interactive activities are curtailed to a minimum and limited to brief discussions. We all know that interactive learning is more time consuming and we should only use the content that we design around. Content-heavy seminars typically run long and don't allow transfer of training.

The one trait I hate the most in participants is the inability to let go of their mental filters about interactive learning.

I dislike games that are designed without a purpose but for a fun experience. If participants do not clearly see "What's in it for me (or for my organization)", they perceive the session as a waste of their time.

Thiagi: What is your favorite game?

Tatiana: It is a summary process that I have designed recently, based on the board game Cranium. I use this activity at the conclusion of a series of training sessions. Participants break off in teams and the captain of each team gets to see a summary point on a PowerPoint slide that also specifies the way they will communicate the message to their team. Then they have a limited period of time to draw it out like Pictionary, act it out like in Charades, make up the right question to get the answer from the team like in Jeopardy, or mold it out of Play Dough! This guarantees an increase in the levels of energy and playfulness at the end of the day.

Thiagi: Do you have any book recommendations?

Tatiana: There are so many books that I haven't yet learned from but here are some that I use on a regular basis to get my interactive training wheels turning:

- *Teamwork and Teamplay* by Thiagi & Glenn Parker
- *Training Games* by Susan El-Shamy
- *Developing Intercultural Awareness* by Robert Kohls and John Knight
- *The Accelerated Learning Handbook* by Dave Meier (This is the book that I recommend to any one who asks me what training "approach" I use.)

Thiagi: What is your prediction about the future of games?

Tatiana: I still have a lot to learn before I can make a valid prediction. However, working in a college campus, I can say with confidence that the generation entering the workforce now is a lot more open to interactive game-based learning than the previous generation. These participants have grown up feeling comfortable with the fast paced technology and

the fun, witty style of MTV.

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Production Simulation

THE PLAYFUL PRODUCER **by Tatiana A. Kolovou**

Purpose

To involve members of a staff team in developing a list of organization-specific Best Practices in such important areas as communication, customer service, and professionalism.

Process

Each topic addressed and reviewed for Best Practices will be on a video clip. All of the filming, script writing and acting is done in-house. The scenarios will each be filmed twice; once with a "Taboo" theme and the other with the "Do" theme. When the video clips are completed, a larger group in the organization will view them and discuss a list of Best Practices for the entire organization.

Special Considerations

This interactive activity requires a lot of planning and design time, involving many members of the organization. It is best to be used for annual retreats and end of the year company meetings. The video theme can carry the entire theme of your annual meeting.

Participants

Select suitable people to fulfill these roles:

Directors - this is your core planning committee. They will lead each of the topic teams after they decide on which specific topics the organization needs to focus on.

Cast members - each topic team needs 3-4 cast members. They will star in the skit and help with scriptwriting. Directors do most of the recruiting for these roles.

Cameo Appearances - these are well known faces in the organization who draw interest and laughs when they appear in a video skit. This is also a great way to involve the important people in the organization and show evidence of their support.

Video and Editing Talent - someone in the organization that has access to a microphone equipped camcorder and the ability to edit video clips. A digital video camera will make editing much faster and simpler.

General Audience - these are members of the organization that will view the Taboos & Dos videos and with some facilitated guidance develop a list of Best Practices for the organization.

The Playful Producer - This is the role that you will play as the orchestrator of this entire process. You will need to explain the concept to the team of Directors and convince them that this is a brilliant way to arrive to a list of Best Practices for an organization while building teamwork and involving many staff members in the process.

Production Stages

Stage 1. Meet with the Directors and explain the process and purpose of this project. Do a group brainstorm and prioritize to a list of 3-4 topics that can be addressed by the video Taboos and Dos. Allow 3 months from the time of the initial meeting to the day of the "Developing Best Practices" seminar. Use some video examples to explain the end product. (If you e-mail me [tatianak@indiana.edu] I would be happy to share some video clips with you.)

Stage 2. After the Directors have a grasp of the project, send them out and recruit their cast members. At the first meeting, the Directors explain the team project and start brainstorming the list of Taboos and Do's for their video. For example, if they are scripting for a video clip on Communication, the taboos will feature 4-5 examples of bad communication. These video segments can be with customers, other staff, supervisors or anyone who the main character comes into contact with. The Communication dos will show the same types of scenarios with the main character thriving and efficiently dealing with the situations.

Stage 3. When the Directors and Cast members have the ball rolling on the video project, meet with them to discuss specifics. Each video should last no longer that 2 to 3 minutes,

the Taboo examples should be easy to point out, the script should be simple enough for one camera to film the scene in a single shot, and the dos video segments should allow some room for improvement.

Stage 4. After the Directors have met with their teams for a second time, each team should have formed an idea for a script. Review this main theme and discuss the concept with each team. You may ask for a rough script so you can make sure that each team is on the right track and their examples are “camera ready”.

Stage 5. When all the teams have an idea for their script, start filming. Lines do not have to be practiced. In fact you will get the best bloopers if they are not. One to two takes should be sufficient for this project. Remember you are not looking for network TV quality here as long as the sound is clear and the picture is focused. The video editor can wrap the clips together with some titles in the beginning and list of cast members at the end of each segment.

Final Product

When the 3-4 video segments for the Taboos and Dos are edited and ready, you can use them for the “Developing Best Practices” training session. During this session, participants can view the Taboo video clips and conduct a discussion using the following types of debriefing questions:

- How will this interaction impact the relationship between the staff member and the customer?
- How will this interaction impact the organization?
- What assumptions is the staff member making in their interaction?

Later, the participants watch the Do video segment and discuss the following questions:

- What behaviors did you recognize as being different?
- Who has initial control of the interaction?
- What are the lessons learned from this scenario?

As a final activity, participants brainstorm a list of Best Practices for each topic with the

premise of further improving what they saw in the Dos video. Your role in this session is to introduce the debriefing questions and guide the group towards the Best Practices brainstorm process.

Training Goes To Tinsel Town

These ideas come strictly from practical experience and credit should be given to the clients I have worked with since they are the ones who have taken this concept to the "next" level.

If you want to give this project a Hollywood twist, you may use some of these ideas:

- Create a buzz around the video clips and promote the final closing session of the meeting as the Oscar night. Hang movies posters in the hallways; stretch a red carpet (red paper will do) leading to the large group meeting room. Ask the "nominees" to show up in formal wear and prepare acceptance speeches.
- Schedule this final wrap up to be in a room with good audiovisuals, screen projection, and sound effects. The bigger the screen the more "Oscar Night" like the experience.
- Develop categories for Oscar nominations and show video clips just like they do in Hollywood. It helps if there is music playing in the background and the announcer is in a tux! The audience can vote via the "Clapometer" method, which can add excitement and noise to the closing of your meeting.
- Include category ideas such as the usual best actor, best actress, best supporting actor, and best producer. Some groups have added a "best use of a prop" category and best cameo appearance.
- Give out Oscar statues as awards! You can find them in novelty store catalogues such as Kipp Brothers (www.kippbro.com).
- Show bloopers from the filming process - these get the best laughs. You can even have a best blooper Oscar award!
- Take the opportunity to showcase the lists of Best Practices that your working group came up with by printing them on the Oscar awards program to be handed out to everyone that enters the room.

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Workshop Announcement

High-Performance Teamwork

I have just completed field testing a new workshop that features several innovative components. I am excited to announce this workshop.

New Situations And A New Approach

The nature of business teams today is different from teams in your grandparents' times. Today's teams are rapidly assembled to meet urgent needs. Team members are likely to be strangers to each other because teams are cross-functional and cross-cultural in nature. Teams work under tight time pressures in an unpredictable environment with incomplete information.

Traditional approaches to teambuilding and team training don't work effectively in creating teams to meet the demands of the modern workplace. It is true that high ropes exercises and white water rafting rapidly bond team members and excite them into working effectively during the teambuilding activity. However, the newly acquired trust, skills, and knowledge do not transfer to the workplace.

In contrast to traditional teambuilding approaches, we use a less threatening activity and constantly debrief participants to discover and specify strategies that can be applied to the workplace.

Teampay Results In Teamwork

The heart of the workshop is Mattel's board game BREAK THE SAFE. This board game is unlike any that you have played before because it depends on cooperative teamwork. Surprisingly, this family game reflects all elements of today's workplace and provides an excellent metaphor for high-performance teamwork.

Workshop Outline

The workshop lasts for 6-8 hours and can be conducted with any number of participants.

Its goal is to empower you (and every other participant) to become an effective member of a high-performance team working in an unpredictable environment. After the workshop, you return to your workplace with ready-to-use principles, procedures, techniques, and tools.

Here's a detailed outline of the workshop:

Module 1. Workshop Orientation

Objectives:

Identify critical features of high-performance teams in today's workplace.

React to the objectives and format of the workshop.

Activities:

Presentation and discussion

Module 2. Learn To Play

Objectives:

Learn the rules of the BREAK THE SAFE game using a teamwork strategy.

Set up and play a practice round of the game.

Identify key requirements for effective team goals and team membership in a high-performance team.

Activities:

Play an Each Teach game to master the rules of BREAK THE SAFE.

Play a practice round of BREAK THE SAFE.

Debrief to focus on team goals and roles.

Module 3. Plan To Play

Objectives:

Select specific principles for effectively achieving the team's goal.

Identify key tasks to be completed in the team activity.

Prepare a teamwork plan by listing key principles and tasks and assigning them to specific team members.

Activities:

Select and allocate teamwork principles by using a collaborative strategy.

Select and allocate key tasks to team members.

Module 4. Play to Learn

Objectives:

Implement the team plan while playing the BREAK THE SAFE game.

Identify how teamwork principles can be adapted and applied to workplace teams.

Learn from team failure or success in an accountable fashion.

Activities:

Play BREAK THE SAFE game.

Debrief and discuss how to learn from team failures and successes.

Module 5. Give and Receive Feedback

Objectives:

Give positive feedback and constructive suggestions to other members of your team.

Receive feedback and suggestions with an open mind.

Identify suitable changes in personal performance to improve participation.

Activities:

Play FEEDBACK ENVELOPES game.

Debrief to discuss workplace applications of giving and receiving feedback.

Module 6. Play with Strangers

Objectives:

Participate as an effective member of a team of strangers working under a tight schedule.

Apply teamwork principles to the workplace.

Activities:

Play BREAK THE SAFE with a new group of teammates.

Debrief to discuss workplace applications of effective teamwork principles.

Module 7. Words and Pictures

Objectives:

Identify key elements of high-performance teamwork.

Summarize these elements in an easy-to-remember poster.

Activities:

Play WORDS AND PICTURES game as a member of a new team.

Debrief to focus on continuous learning and application.

Module 8. Plan for Action

Objectives:

Review teamwork experiences and discussions to identify application ideas.

Write down a practical idea for improving teamwork in the workplace.

Activities:

Play THIRTY-FIVE.

Debrief to identify high-impact guidelines for effective teamwork.

Module 9. The End — Not!

Objectives:

Practice teamwork skills at every given opportunity.

Activities:

Select teamwork guidelines for personal implementation.

Prepare an action plan.

An Invitation

The first public offering of this workshop is scheduled as a preconference session at the 2004 ISPI International Conference and Expo

(<http://www.ispi.org/ac2004/workshops.htm>) .

Please contact me (thiagi@thiagi.com) if you would like to bring this workshop to your organization.

A Final Thought

High-performance teamwork depends on *individual* skills. Improve your skills by participating in our workshop.

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Online Strategy

An Open Question on Open Questions

An OQ is an open question presented on a web page. Your task is to read the question and type an appropriate answer in a convenient form. Once you have contributed your answer,

you compare your answer with other participants' answers.

This month's OQ is related to the lead article on open questions.

Here's the OQ: *What strategies can we use for encouraging players to produce and recognize creative responses?*

Type your response on [this month's OQ page](#).

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Pithy Saying

Of Mice and Minds.

True interactivity is not in your mouse, but in your mind.

This is how my friend, Daniel Roberts, summarized the key message from my recent workshop on designing online learning.

Many designers with fervent faith on “interactivity” load their online courses with multiple-choice questions that test the regurgitation of content. Of course, these interspersed questions significantly improve the learners' performance—at clicking the mouse button.

I believe that covert, cognitive interaction is more important than the public behavior of clicking mouse buttons. Personally, I find the mouse-clicking type of interactivity to be disruptive and distracting.

In my online courses and virtual classrooms, I encourage participants to talk back to me, their tutor, by pretending that their monitor hides a microphone that is hooked up to my headphones. I ask a few short-answer and open-ended questions and ask participants to shout out the answer. This may startle the bystanders but will definitely increase the mastery and recall of the content.

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Contest

Variations

Most games that I write include a section called *Variations*. I left out the Variations section for the opener, [WORKING THE ROOM](#). I want you to come up with variations for this game. This will improve your game-design skills. Also, the best entry (as determined by our panel of judges) will receive a \$50 gift certificate that can be used to purchase any Workshops by Thiagi, Inc. product.

Think of different constraints under which WORKING THE ROOM might be used: not enough time, too few participants, too many participants, participants who already know each other, and so on. How you would change the game to work under these constraints?

Send us your list of variations.

The Rules

Judging criteria include creativity, usability, clarity, number of variations, and potential appeal to facilitators.

Limit your entry to one double-spaced letter-size page.

There are three ways to submit your entry:

- E-mail your entry (as an attachment) to thiagi@thiagi.com. Put "November Contest" in the subject line.
- Mail your entry to Play for Performance, 4423 East Trailridge Road, Bloomington, IN 47408-9633.
- Fax your entry to (812) 332-1478. No cover page needed.

Include your name, address, e-mail address, and telephone number with your entry.

The decision of our judges is final.

Your entry or entries become property of Play for Performance permitting us to publish it

online or in print. (Of course, you will be given full credit.)

Deadline for the November Contest is **January 1, 2004**. Entries must be **received** by this date. (Keep this in mind if you send an entry by postal mail.)

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