

COMING INTO THE LIGHT:  
INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND ITS EFFECTS AT WORK

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## **EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW**

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is not traditionally regarded as a workplace concern. Recent research, however, demonstrates that IPV has significant effects on both employees and on organization-related outcomes. In this paper, we discuss current knowledge regarding the ways that IPV is manifested in the workplace, its prevalence at work, and its costs. Then, using a case study format, we trace the development of an IPV program in one company, Liz Claiborne, Inc. Finally, we discuss “best practices” for managers interested in addressing the IPV-related issues that may affect their workplaces.

## INTRODUCTION

*“It was very hard to go to work and get there on time sometimes because if I didn’t have the clothing that he felt was what he wanted me to wear then I would have to change clothes in the mornings and [that] would make me late to work many times. And anytime you go to a job and you’re upset and you think you can try to leave things at home it just doesn’t always work, especially when you have such a steady diet [of abuse] on a sometimes daily basis. So your mind is thinking, I’ve got to do this, I’ve got a job to do but you can’t concentrate fully on what you’re doing. I hid it mostly from my employers. I think that they possibly knew more than they ever let me know. Some of them were somewhat supportive. They didn’t ever offer any kind of advice on what I could do...because back when this was going on and I was working, it didn’t seem like the employers really took this as serious as it really is and I think this has been going on for years but women are just now coming out and standing up for themselves. They get away from the fear or they get a hold of it or something so that they can talk to people more about it. For so long, I hid it for so long.”*

*-Quote from an employee who experienced intimate partner violence*

It is something of a “dirty little secret” that family violence affects the workplace. Most employers are very aware of traditional workplace violence situations, wherein an employee assaults another employee, but a sizeable percentage of violent actions that unfold on work premises involve domestic disputes. Oddly, employers seem less interested in addressing this form of violence, although it can be equally deadly and result in equally negative effects for employees and the organization. In fact, a study commissioned by Liz Claiborne, Inc. (2007) suggested that although a majority of surveyed Fortune 1500 executives acknowledged that intimate partner violence (IPV) affects their businesses, only 13% believed that corporations have a major role to play in addressing IPV. This is an oddly passive reaction from corporate managers, a group of people who typically attack costly problems when they are identified.

Conversations the authors have had with executives suggest the reasoning behind this “head in the sand” approach. Employers simply are uncertain about their role in what is regarded as a personal, family matter. Not surprisingly, they are reluctant to become embroiled in disputes between domestic partners, a precarious place to be both legally and from a

managerial standpoint. However, pioneering companies and advocacy groups are demonstrating that there is a proactive approach to this difficult problem. In addition, there is emerging attention by management researchers to the ways that IPV can affect the workplace, in terms of effects on victims<sup>1</sup>, coworkers, and the organization's bottom line. This paper summarizes what is currently known about IPV and the workplace and shares information on the solutions that are emerging through research and practice.

We begin with an explanation of IPV as a form of workplace violence. We then discuss current knowledge regarding the impact of IPV on the workplace. Next we discuss the experiences of one company that has initiated a number of IPV programs and policies, and the lessons learned in this organization. Finally, we present current best practices for employers interested in addressing this important issue.

### **IPV: A UNIQUE FORM OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE**

In an effort to better understand causes and possible solutions, experts have organized workplace violence into four broad categories, referred to as Type I, Type II, Type III, or Type IV violence (U.S. Department of Justice, 2004). *Type I* violence involves violent acts by criminals who enter the workplace to commit robbery or some other crime, but who have no other connection with the workplace. *Type II* violence involves violence directed at employees by individuals to whom the employer provides services (for example, clients, customers, patients). *Type III* violence involves violence against organizational insiders (coworkers, supervisors, managers) that is initiated by organizational insiders (current or former employees). Finally, *Type IV* involves violence committed in the workplace by a perpetrator who is not an

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<sup>1</sup> Although some IPV scholars and advocates dislike the term "victim," we use it here for two reasons: 1) it is consistent with terminology used in previous reports, and 2) it is more parsimonious than alternative terms such as "target of abuse."

employee but who has a personal relationship with an employee. The vast majority of attention by managers and management researchers has occurred around Type III violence. For example, an article in a recent edition of this journal discussed the causes and implications of employee-employee deviance and offered suggestions for how such violence could be effectively managed (Litzky, Eddelston, & Kidder, 2006).

IPV, also called domestic violence or spouse abuse, is violence committed by a spouse, ex-spouse, or current or former boyfriend or girlfriend (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003). IPV can occur among married or unmarried couples, it can involve heterosexual or same-sex couples, and victims of IPV can be male or female. Although some cases of IPV might be categorized as Type III violence (such as if both intimate partners work for the same employer), most IPV falls under the Type IV categorization.

The “typical” scenario in Type IV IPV-related violence involves an intimate partner crossing the organizational boundary in order to enact violence and/or control over the employee. This boundary crossing could take the form of the perpetrator physically entering the workplace or it could involve the perpetrator using other communication channels, such as the telephone or e-mail, to harass an employee while she or he is at work. It could involve actual physical acts of aggression or it could involve non-physical but control-oriented actions such as stalking. The key defining aspect of IPV is that it is an effort by the perpetrator to frighten and thereby control the targeted employee.

Although all forms of workplace violence are challenging for employers to eradicate, IPV-related violence involves some unique aspects that make it particularly difficult to manage. First, because IPV originates in the home, employers (such as the executives in the research study referred to earlier) may often be uncertain about their responsibilities and rights around this

issue. For example, a convenience store manager does not debate her responsibility to protect employees from robbery, but may be quite unsure about whether physical protection from a spouse is a required or appropriate part of the employment contract. The lack of clear employment laws or guidelines around this issue exacerbates the problem. Second, IPV victims (compared to other victims of workplace violence) are likely to be more reluctant to report experienced violence to their supervisors due to shame or fear of job loss (Shepard & Pence, 1988). Third, because of its differential origin and root causes, prevention efforts around IPV (compared to other forms of workplace violence) are likely to be different and more removed from the organization's usual purview. For example, employers who want to prevent Type III violence often focus on job and work environment factors such as reducing job ambiguity or enhancing fair treatment (Litzky et al., 2006). Such efforts, however, will be impotent in regard to IPV, given its differential source and causes.

On the other hand, IPV-related violence does mimic other forms of violence in several important ways. First, it has very negative effects on targeted employees and on the employing organization. Second, it has the potential to spill over to, and negatively impact, coworkers who witness or hear about the violence. Finally, through the *general duty clause* of OSHA, employers have a responsibility to keep employees safe from known hazards and risks, a common denominator that exists across different forms of workplace violence. We turn now to research that describes in detail the landscape faced by employers as they try to fulfill this duty.

### **THE TYPES, PREVALENCE AND COSTS OF WORK-RELATED IPV**

Oddly enough, the workplace is a very likely setting for IPV given the number of hours that employees spend there and the predictability of their presence in the work environment. This is particularly the case when a victim has taken steps to leave an abusive home

environment. IPV is motivated by a desire to control the intimate partner, so perpetrators who extend their abuse to the work setting are increasing the number of domains in which they control their partners. Further, by harassing, stalking, and threatening the target at work, perpetrators may succeed in getting the victim fired and thereby increase the victim's dependence (Farmer & Tiefenthaler, 1997; Gemignani, 2000, Reeves, O'Leary-Kelly, Farmer, Paetzold, & Tiefenthaler, 2001).

Certainly, IPV enacted on work premises creates immediate and alarming consequences for employees and employers. However, accumulating research evidence suggests that even when the abuse occurs outside the work environment, it still can have significant consequences for work-related behavior and outcomes. In this section, we describe the forms that work-related IPV might take, share information about the prevalence of work-related IPV, and describe research that demonstrates the impact of IPV on the workplace.

### **Types of Work-Related IPV**

Researchers have categorized two primary forms of job interference tactics used by IPV perpetrators (Swanberg, Logan, & Macke, 2005): work disruption and work-related stalking. *Work disruption* involves acts by the perpetrator, such as hiding clothing or turning off alarm clocks, aimed at preventing the victim from reaching the workplace, and it can include direct or indirect interference (Swanberg et al., 2005). *Work-related stalking* often occurs on work premises. Here the perpetrator focuses unwanted and repeated attention on the victim at or near the work setting, including actions such as repeated phone calls or e-mails directed at the victim or coworkers (see Swanberg et al., 2005 for a more detailed review of studies). Although we separate out these different forms of IPV in order to facilitate explanation, it is important to note that they often occur together.

## **Prevalence of Work-Related IPV**

Given the work-related challenges faced by IPV victims, it is important for employers to know what proportion of their employees might be affected. Two large scale studies of IPV in the United States (the *National Violence Against Women Survey* [NVAWS] conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institute of Justice, and the *National Crime Victimization Survey* [NCVS] conducted annually by the Bureau of Justice Statistics) report alarming statistics about the prevalence of IPV in the general population. For example, the NVAWS study found that 25.5 percent of women and 7.9 percent of men had been abused by an intimate partner some time in their lifetimes (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Although the original report on the NVAWS did not give attention to the prevalence of IPV among *employed* individuals, subsequent analyses of this database suggest that battered women are actually *more likely* to be employed than are non-battered women, and this finding also has been supported by subsequent analyses of the NCVS data (Farmer & Tiefenthaler, 2004a, 2004b). In fact, 61 percent of the battered women in the NCVS sample were employed versus 55 percent of non-battered women, while 65 percent of battered women in the NVAWS sample were employed versus 57 percent of non-battered women.

At first glance, these findings seem counterintuitive. Common sense would suggest that individuals who face the work disruption and work stalking events described earlier would be less able to secure and retain a job than those who do not. However, these research findings cannot be easily dismissed because they are consistent across multiple reputable studies.

Thinking about this at a deeper level, one plausible explanation for the higher rates of employment among abused women is that IPV victims seek out employment as an escape route. That is, IPV victims may be more likely to work outside the home because employment allows

them to accumulate the financial resources that will be required for them to leave their abusive situation (Farmer & Tiefenthaler, 2004b). Employment is not “just a job,” but may represent a lifeline for individuals who are trying to extricate themselves from abusive domestic situations.

It is important to note that although the studies just described provide initial insights, they did not focus on IPV in relation to the workplace specifically. Workplace IPV was the focus of a more recent study (Reeves & O’Leary-Kelly, 2007; Reeves, Bates, & O’Leary-Kelly, 2006) that assessed IPV prevalence among only working people. This study involved nearly 2400 respondents in three organizations (an insurance provider, an educational institution, and a transportation company) in facilities that spanned 39 states. Respondents reported both their current experiences with IPV (those that occurred within the last twelve months) and their lifetime experiences with IPV. The study asked about five forms of abuse: *threats* of physical harm, *stalking* (defined as a pattern of unwelcome and harassing contact that leaves one feeling afraid), *physical aggression* (including hitting, slapping, kicking, punching, scratching, pushing, biting or other use of physical force), *being physically hurt* as a result of abuse, and being forced into *unwanted sexual acts*. The experiences of the employees in this study are presented in Tables 1 and 2, and they suggest that IPV is a remarkably common experience among employees in these three diverse companies.

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Insert Tables 1 and 2 About Here.  
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As seen in Table 1, ten percent of both female and male employees reported some experience with IPV within the past twelve months. It is surprising that men reported the same level of abuse as did women, given that society regards domestic violence as a crime that affects primarily women. And indeed, further inspection of these data show that while male and female

employees are equally likely to report *some* experience with IPV, women reported both more *frequent* abuse and more *severe* forms of violence (for example, being hurt by physical violence or experiencing sexual abuse) (Reeves & O’Leary-Kelly, 2007; Reeves et al., 2006). This study also reported some startling results related to lifetime victimization. As shown in Table 2, an additional 19 percent of male employees and 30 percent of female employees had experienced IPV sometime in their lifetimes. Deeper inspection of the data related to lifetime victimization again revealed that female employees reported more frequent and more severe abuse.

Because we exist in an information rich society, people often read statistics and results of research studies with little genuine attention. For that reason, we ask the reader to stop for a moment and really consider what the numbers in Tables 1 and 2 mean in regard to the nearly 2,400 employees in the three very typical work organizations that were involved in this study. Fully ten percent of these employees are right now, in the present, experiencing abusive events in their lives. These employees face tremendous challenges in getting to work, being productive, and (in many cases) trying to hide their situation from colleagues. In addition, double to triple this number of employees are in some phase of recovery from having experienced abuse at a previous time in their lives. These are astonishing numbers and they suggest that managers who assume that the problem exists “out there” and that their employees are not being affected are naïve indeed.

Before we turn to a discussion of the work-related costs of IPV, it is worth reiterating that IPV can affect the workplace directly or indirectly. In the former case, IPV actually occurs on work premises. The previously-described study of working people (Reeves & O’Leary-Kelly, 2007; Reeves et al., 2006) asked employees whether the abuse they experienced has ever occurred at work. As shown in Table 3, 19% of employees indicated that some form of IPV had

taken place at work. Not surprisingly, the most common form of IPV to occur at work was stalking, with over 50 percent of IPV victims indicating that their intimate partner had repeatedly harassed them on work premises. Threats of physical assault also occurred quite frequently on work premises, with nearly nine percent of victimized employees reporting that their partner had threatened them at work. Finally, two percent of IPV victims reported that they had experienced physical aggression and two percent reported that they had been hurt while at work. This latter situation is particularly problematic for employers, who are charged with keeping employees physically safe while on the employer's property.

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Insert Table 3 About Here.  
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### **Costs of Work-Related IPV**

There is a great deal of research on work-family roles (e.g., Edwards & Rothbard, 1999, 2000; Rothbard, 2001) and this work demonstrates both positive spillover (e.g., that positive emotions in one role can be associated with higher engagement in the other role) and negative spillover (e.g., that negative emotions in one role can be associated with lower engagement in the other role). In the case of IPV, however, most spillover is likely to come in the form of negative effects, or costs. Without doubt, the primary costs of IPV are borne by victims and their children. Experts agree that IPV has severe negative effects on the psychological and physical health of victims and their families (see Campbell, 2002; Logan, Walker, Cole, & Leukefeld, 2002). Less immediately threatening, but certainly important to long-term well-being, are the work-related or economic effects of IPV. If IPV influences an employee's ability to get to work on time, to be productive, and to stay employed, there will be serious financial consequences. In such cases, the most profound consequences accrue to the victims who may lose their jobs and

their earning power. In addition, there are costs for employers when their employees are absent or tardy, display low productivity, or are unable to retain a job. In this section, we explain what is currently known about the effects of IPV on various work behavior.<sup>2</sup>

### *Absenteeism and Tardiness*

We mentioned that perpetrators often make it difficult for IPV victims to get to work, and several studies provide preliminary research support (see Swanberg et al., 2005 and Reeves, 2004). The typical study in this genre focuses on a small number of women who are known IPV victims, asks them whether IPV ever caused them to be late to or absent from work, and reports on percentages of victims who respond affirmatively. Findings from such studies show that the majority of abused women indicate that IPV affected their ability to attend work and to get to work on time. While these studies provide preliminary evidence, they also reflect methodological limitations (e.g., small sample sizes, biased samples, no comparison group) that prevent strong confidence in the results.

Interestingly, the large-scale study mentioned earlier (which involved a large sample size and a comparison of the absenteeism of victims to that of nonvictims (Reeves & O’Leary-Kelly, 2007; Reeves et al., 2006) found differing results. This study found no significant differences when comparing the absence rates of current victims and nonvictims. That is, employees who currently were experiencing IPV (i.e., within the last twelve months) were no more likely to be absent than nonvictimized employees. However, lifetime victims were more likely to be absent than nonvictims. Additionally, victims were also more likely to be tardy than other employees.

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<sup>2</sup> Although our current knowledge regarding work-related effects of IPV is based on research, it is important to note that there is great variability in the quality of studies to date. Given that this is a new area of research, this variability is not unusual. It is worth noting, however, that we focus in this section on the most methodologically valid research studies. This allows us to draw the most defensible conclusions about how IPV affects work behaviors.

So, there is some inconsistency in research results. Results from multiple studies suggest that IPV is associated with higher absenteeism and tardiness, however, these studies have methodological limitations that prevent strong confidence in the results. Alternatively, one study suggests no effects of IPV on absenteeism for current victims, although the methodology used in this study inspires greater confidence. Clearly, more research evidence is needed before we can put this question to rest. However, it is safe to conclude that in many cases IPV victims overcome the significant obstacles they face and attend work as frequently as do other employees. This finding is consistent with a research finding we reported earlier—that victimized women tend to be present in the workforce to a greater extent than do nonvictimized women. Taken together, these findings reiterate the importance that employment appears to have for abused women. Employment is the path to economic power, which is necessary for victims to move out of abusive domestic situations.

### ***Work Distraction Resulting in Lost Productivity***

In regard to the effects of IPV on employee productivity, perhaps the most accurate summary of current knowledge is that there are negative effects of IPV on productivity (see Swanberg & Logan, 2005; Reeves, 2004), but the magnitude of these effects is not yet clear. Again, the primary challenge is to get results from methodologically strong research studies. Therefore, we again turn to the recent study of IPV among employed individuals (Reeves & O’Leary-Kelly, 2007; Reeves et al., 2006). Consistent with previous studies, these results suggested that current victims display significantly higher levels of work distraction compared to nonvictimized employees. Results also indicated that current victims experience significantly higher levels of work distraction compared to lifetime victims. Not surprisingly, the message is that employees who currently are experiencing IPV are more distracted at work than are

employees who are not currently experiencing such trauma. Also important are results showing that individuals who are no longer experiencing IPV (lifetime victims) do not display high levels of work distraction, suggesting that the effects of IPV on work productivity dissipate when employees are removed from abusive situations. This suggests that employer efforts to assist victims can make a difference not only in the lives of victims, but also in the effects that IPV has on productivity and thereby on the financial outcomes of employers themselves.

### ***Health Care Costs***

There also are health care-related costs associated with IPV. These costs occur when victims seek assistance such as mental health services, alcohol/drug services, inpatient admits, hospital outpatient visits, emergency room visits, dental services and pharmacy services. Although some studies suffer from the methodological limitations described earlier, a number of empirically-strong studies have examined the relationship between IPV victimization and health care costs. These studies have examined the likelihood that victims seek medical care (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000), the type of medical care received, and the average cost of the medical services for IPV-related injuries (NCIPC, 2003; Rivara, Anderson, Fishman, Bonomi, Reid, Carrell, & Thompson, 2007; Wisner, Gilmer, Saltzman, & Zink, 1999; Max, Rice, Finkelstein, Bardwell, & Leadbetter, 2004; Arias and Corso, 2005). These studies report that the average cost of IPV victimization ranges from \$294 (NCIPC, 2003) to \$948 (Arias and Corso, 2005) per IPV incident. Further, in cases where the victim must be hospitalized, Max et al. (2004) found an average hospitalization cost of \$14,363. These studies also suggest that victims require an average expenditure of \$439 (Rivara et al., 2007) to \$1775 (Wisner et al., 1999) more per year on medical care compared to nonvictims.

### **Summary**

While there is much work to be done in understanding the nature and magnitude of effects, there is little doubt that there are negative consequences of IPV for both employees and employers. In other words, research supports the conclusion of those Fortune 1500 executives we mentioned at the start of this paper—IPV is affecting their businesses. At this point, the most accurate summary statement is that IPV affects an employee’s ability to be mentally engaged while at work, although it does not necessarily influence this employee’s ability to be physically present at work. In fact, it appears that despite significant obstacles, victimized employees find a way to get to their jobs, probably because these jobs are necessary to economic independence, an important prerequisite to moving out of the abusive situation (Farmer & Tiefenthaler, 2004b). There also is evidence that employees who are able to exit abusive situations are able to recover and become fully engaged workers (that is, they no longer display elevated levels of work distraction). Finally, the medical costs associated with IPV are quite astonishing, and because many employers provide medical insurance, a large percentage of these medical costs are paid by employers.

So, what can an employer do about this pervasive problem that limits the potential of employees and also has negative effects on organizational outcomes and performance? We address that question in the remainder of this paper, adopting two perspectives. First, we use a case history perspective and describe the efforts of a company that has been working on its IPV programs for over a decade. Second, we share best practices that have emerged from this company, and other companies, that have been leaders in the effort to find effective ways to manage the work-related effects of IPV.

### **IMPLEMENTING AN IPV PROGRAM AT WORK: A CASE STUDY**

As with most “real life” scenarios, the case history of IPV programs at Liz Claiborne, Inc. is a transformation story. The company’s goals for this program started in one direction and shifted to another; the company’s early experiences shaped and determined its subsequent actions; there were failures that facilitated later successes. This rich history was relayed to us by Ms. Jane Randel, Vice President of Corporate Communications in Fall- 2006, in her office in New York City. This interview was followed by phone interviews with several other key executives, including Dennis Butler, Vice President of Workplace Solutions (lead Human Resource executive); Paul Giraldi, Vice President of Global Security; and Lori Keurian, Vice President, Deputy General Counsel (lead executive for legal issues relating to IPV programs). Each of these individuals was extensively involved in the evolution of the company’s IPV programs.

### **Background Information**

Established in 1976, Liz Claiborne, Inc. began as a women’s clothing design business founded by Liz Claiborne and three partners. These founders recognized that the increasing number of women entering the workforce provided an excellent opportunity for designing and selling a broad range of career-oriented wardrobe options. The company experienced early success and went public in 1981. By 1985, Liz Claiborne, Inc. was listed on the Fortune 500, the first company founded by a woman to be so recognized. Liz Claiborne, Inc. is now a multi-billion dollar company that sells its fashion apparel and accessories brands in markets ranging from the United States to Europe to the Middle East.

### **IPV Initiatives at Liz Claiborne, Inc.**

To this point in the paper, we have been building the case that employers should take an interest in IPV because there is increasing evidence that this issue affects company performance

and profitability. However, there is another reason that employers become involved—that is, they want to be socially responsible organizational citizens. Indeed, an IPV program could be thought of as a corporate social responsibility (CSR) program, and CSR programs are increasingly common in business organizations (Pirsch, Gupta, & Grau, 2007). CSR is defined as “actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interest of the firm and that which is required by law” (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001, p. 117). Research suggests that CSR programs have beneficial outcomes, such as a positive impact on the purchase of company products (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001) and thereby on firm performance (Ruf, Muralidhar, Brown, Janney, & Paul, 2001; Hillman, 2005). Because of the positive effects on firm performance, some companies may undertake CSR programs for primarily instrumental reasons, while others may have a true interest in promoting social welfare. In fact, researchers have suggested that CSR efforts be thought of along a continuum from those that are primarily *Promotional* to those that are *Institutionalized* (Pirsch et al., 2007). With promotional CSR initiatives, the goal is to enhance product sales; with an institutionalized approach, the company has an authentic and abiding interest in the social issue and integrates its CSR programs and initiatives throughout its operations.

Liz Claiborne, Inc.’s initial goals around IPV are a textbook case of promotional CSR. Liz Claiborne, Inc. (LCI) began its involvement with the IPV issue in the early 1990’s, and it occurred as an effort to build positive press for the organization. As described by Ms. Randel:

*“We started the program really as a straight forward cause marketing campaign. It was at a time when competition was starting to increase in the apparel industry and Liz Claiborne was really fighting for editorial coverage of the brand. We decided to do a cause marketing program and looked at three very different initiatives. At the end of that trial, one of them didn’t pan out at all, one of them was so-so, and the domestic violence one was pretty successful. In fact, our efforts in San Francisco were the catalyst for an organization that is still in existence called Partners Ending Abuse, a consortium of domestic violence*

*organizations. We evaluated our progress in these three areas and realized that our resources could best be used by putting everything under a big umbrella. It was better to focus on one issue and domestic violence was the issue that required the most attention because statistically the numbers [of abuse victims] were astounding. So, in the beginning this was a cause marketing program and really intended for consumers and an external audience.”*

However, as the company gained visibility for promoting IPV prevention to the public, these actions began to have unanticipated effects internally. Corporate executives became educated about IPV and its prevalence and negative effects on women. Employees took note of the company’s association with this issue. Internally, there was a growing recognition of LCI as a company that was doing the right thing around an important social problem. In effect, the company’s reasons for involvement in the IPV issue were showing the first signs of shifting. The initial “promotional” goals of enhancing public image and increasing sales began to be accompanied by an authentic interest in the issue itself and a pride that the company was tackling such a difficult social problem. As stated by Ms. Randel:

*“It was interesting how impressive it was for this company to take on this issue, which was perceived as such a dirty little secret, which was so dark and no one wanted to talk about it. But the notion that if a company like Liz Claiborne would attach its name to it, it could get it out of the darkness and into the light and people would start to talk about it.”*

As LCI’s association with the IPV issue became increasingly well-known, both to external stakeholders and to management, program advocates recognized that the company needed to expand its scope of attention. There was a growing feeling that IPV prevention initiatives must address not only external stakeholders (consumers, the public) but also internal stakeholders (employees). As described by Ms. Randel:

*“There was this realization that we were doing all these things for people outside the organization, so we should see what we could do inside the organization. It was almost hypocritical not to.”*

This presented a significant challenge because at this time (the early 1990s) there was little guidance in corporate America for how to develop an internally-focused IPV program. And efforts to promote IPV prevention in society generally require a quite different focus than efforts directed at employees, so current knowledge did not translate well. We will see that in a very real sense, the early efforts of LCI set the stage for the best practices that have evolved in the corporate arena. As described here by Ms. Randel, LCI's first internal initiatives focused on education:

*“Our first foray into this was that we had a company nurse who worked with the people in marketing to create a series of seminars on family relationships. First they did one on relationships and then they did one on family communication. We thought the trick was to call it something that would not frighten people away from attending. The year we touted it as a seminar on “relationships” people went thinking it was going to be like “Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus.” When it turned out to be nothing like that, people felt very blind-sided. This was pre-O.J. Simpson, so domestic violence wasn’t an issue that was really talked about.”*

The company offered multiple similar educational seminars, although attendance was not strong. Program advocates also recognized the need for a domestic violence policy, and Ms. Randel describes how the policy prompted internal promotional efforts and communications:

*“We had created a domestic violence policy, and it basically outlined what the company would do if somebody came forward. It stated that we would help refer them [to agencies where they could get help], walk them to their cars, change their [company] phone numbers, very basic stuff. Somewhere along there, we started putting up bathroom signs and posters and trying to do some other basic communications. We put up posters by the elevators and gave out the number of the national [domestic violence] hotline.”*

Although there was a growing commitment to developing internal IPV initiatives, these early years were characterized by a relatively limited involvement of broad corporate leadership. As described by Lori Keurian, Vice President, Deputy General Counsel:

*“I was aware that the company was interested in domestic violence almost from the beginning of my connection with Liz Claiborne. I saw the posters in the*

*bathroom and I knew that Jane was working on the issue through the marketing area. I had a clear sense that we were doing something around domestic violence, but in the early years I was not directly involved.”*

Because LCI was among the first corporations to create internal corporate initiatives around IPV, the company began to be recognized as a corporate leader. Ms. Randel, as an internal champion of the programs, began to receive invitations to speak about the company’s efforts. This increased visibility prompted some soul searching about the true value of their programs and whether they were actually delivering on the intention to assist employees who were struggling with IPV. As Ms. Randel indicated:

*“I was starting to speak here and there and I would go to my security director and I would ask how many [IPV] cases we had in the last year. He’d say none. Now, we are a company that is 75-80% women and it just was not statistically valid [that we had no cases]. So I was always in this kind of struggle. We were so underreported and it was baffling and frustrating to me. In retrospect it was naive certainly, but I felt we had put out all this information and no one was taking advantage of it. All the while we’re doing this external stuff and quite frankly we’re being cited as pioneers in the workplace and I was always really nervous because if you scratched the surface just a little – though we were pioneers in that we had a policy and we had the signs in the bathroom – if you really took a look it was unnerving because we were clearly not doing enough.”*

In the early 2000s, a series of incidents prompted significant change in the company’s approach to IPV. The first incident involved an employee who disclosed to the company that she was an IPV victim and needed assistance. Ms. Randel:

*“What really was the turning point was when I got a call from someone in HR because an employee had come forward [to disclose her IPV victimization]. She had gone to her HR generalist, who in turn went to her director, who also didn’t know what to do and said to call me [Ms. Randel]. I thought this was the stupidest thing I had ever heard. Someone in HR was calling someone in Corporate Communications to help deal with this domestic violence issue in a company that theoretically knows what they are doing? That was a huge wake up call.”*

Dennis Butler, Vice President of Workplace Solutions, provided a similar description of this defining incident:

*“I got a call from an HR generalist who told me that a rising star in the company was calling in sick, that her work was declining, that she had lost weight, and that she was wearing long sleeves even though it was 90 degrees outside. The HR generalist thought that the woman’s husband was beating her and asked me what to do. I told her to call Jane (Randel). In retrospect, this clearly signaled a problem because the Vice President for Communications should not be handling our cases of domestic violence. No one in HR, including myself, made the link between the domestic violence posters in the restroom and the fact that this was a workplace issue that we needed to be prepared to address.”*

The other event that prompted a significant change in focus involved information Ms.

Randel acquired at a workplace violence conference.

*“Simultaneously, I had just returned from a conference the FBI had done on workplace violence and it was really interesting. It was just after 9/11 so there was still a whole lot of talk about security and everyone was really aware and they started talking about these response teams and how you have to be prepared for disasters and emergencies. I came back and shared a lot of information with my security folks but it also all kind of coalesced that we need to create this domestic violence response team and that you need a multi-disciplinary approach to this. HR can’t solve it alone, legal needs to be involved, security as well.”*

In describing this time period, Ms. Keurian reiterated the need for creation of a team that was multi-disciplinary:

*“Many people in management started to talk and decided that we needed to do things differently. We decided to form a team and we felt that the team needed to be multi-disciplinary. We determined that we needed HR, Security, and Legal represented on the team. It was important that our approach be multidisciplinary because each of us brought different expertise to the team, and each of us interacted with associates in different ways. I think it was particularly important to have Legal there in the beginning because so many legal issues were involved. We spent a lot of time considering what our role as a company should be in this area. We discussed what our obligations to our employees were, what we wanted to do beyond our legal obligations, and the legal implications of our decisions.”*

These two events prompted both a new direction in the IPV efforts at Liz Claiborne, Inc. and also a new phase of its IPV programs. As described by Ms. Randel:

*“At this point, we got together and sought outside consultants, people in the domestic violence area to help update our policy and create a protocol that told managers how to approach this issue, what to say and what not to say. Now we*

*had always worked with outside DV experts on our external program, but this time we brought them in to help us directly on our policies. The biggest realization for all of us was the realization that we don't have to be counselors. We just have to know how and to whom to refer people. If I could put something in neon, that's what I would put in neon, because for me that is the biggest barrier for companies getting involved in this issue—thinking that they have to know how to counsel, what to tell this person, when in fact it's so much worse when they try. They just need to know how to get him or her help and that was a huge realization for us. So, this multidisciplinary team got together and we worked on this policy and the protocol, trained HR, all with the blessing of senior management.”*

The comments of these executives suggest several aspects of this new direction that were truly transformative. First, the recognition that a multidisciplinary team was important to helping these initiatives “take hold” was a critical insight and change. This allowed the company to expand the scope of the program and to increase ownership and accountability around the IPV issue. Second, the more extensive outreach to domestic violence experts was transformative because it provided great insights not only around the issue of domestic violence, but also because it clarified that there are resources available in the community that can be tapped by corporate partners. This led to a third significant change during this new phase, a great sense of not only what the company could do around IPV, but also what it could not (and should not) try to do. As Ms. Randel stated, members of the team realized that they were not expected to be experts or counselors, something that is beyond the ability or interest of most corporate managers. Rather, the team realized that there were available external partners who *were* experts, and who could be called upon to provide assistance. This allowed managers to operate in a more comfortable role—that of being a source of information and referral, and not as the parties responsible for “fixing” the employee’s abusive situation. This increased comfort level is well-captured by comments from Ms. Keurian, Vice President, Deputy General Counsel:

*“Initially I had concerns about the company getting involved in the domestic violence issue with our own employees. I was worried that we could open ourselves up to legal risks in ways that didn't previously exist. What if our efforts*

*made things worse for the employee? But as we defined our role as being one of referral, I became much more comfortable with the direction we were taking. I came to understand and believe that these efforts do not put the company at increased risk of legal liability. In fact, I believe that they decrease our risk.”*

With this new direction and focus as a foundation, the company began extensive IPV training. As described by the Vice President of Workplace Solutions, Dennis Butler:

*“First we conducted training with our HR generalists, focusing on what domestic violence is, the signs of domestic violence in the workplace, how to recognize, respond, and refer. For example, some of the classic signs are frequent phone calls, sending lots of flowers, and the partner showing up at work on a regular basis. We then did training with regional and district managers and taught them to recognize, respond, and refer. Then we did training with the company leadership councils, and moved into training managers in our individual retail stores.”*

It is interesting to take note of how far LCI has come in its IPV efforts. The early days were characterized by an external focus and, using language from the CSR continuum mentioned earlier, a purely *promotional* approach to this problem. In the present day, however, LCI has transformed itself into a company that better represents the opposite end of the CSR continuum, one that has *institutionalized* its IPV programs and initiatives. Its primary reason for being in the “IPV business” is no longer about public relations or sales. Rather, the firm now recognizes its IPV initiatives as critical to employee well-being and retention, issues that are core to firm performance. This new perspective was well-characterized by Ms. Keurian:

*“From the beginning, Liz Claiborne was focused on products for women. Women are our core customer base and domestic violence is an issue that affects women so it is an issue that is very relevant to our customers. As we got more involved in the issue, it became obvious that it also affects the workplace. To address this externally but to not address this internally did not make sense and by not addressing it in the workplace the Company may have been put at a greater risk. You may have heard the phrase that domestic violence is a roving crime scene waiting to happen. I believe that our efforts have helped to minimize the risk that our workplace will become the scene of a crime. And beyond this, I really believe we’ve made a difference in some of our employees’ lives.”*

Perhaps not surprisingly, this new approach has resulted in more cases of IPV being reported. As described by Ms. Randel:

*“On the whole, we started to see people come forward, and more than people coming forward, we started to see managers recognize what they might not have recognized as domestic violence, as domestic violence. And that, to me, is very valuable...between then and now, so 2003 until 2006, we’ve had about eighty cases. That is still underreporting, because we have 8,000 people domestically, but it’s better than no cases... In the past, I really think we did have cases. I think that people were being helped, but the information was not funneled corporately.”*

This notion that the work of the multi-disciplinary team led to IPV cases finally being named and appropriately labeled as domestic violence was reiterated by Paul Giraldi, Vice President of Global Security:

*“We were handling domestic violence cases long before we had a formalized program and a domestic violence response team. For many years, our approach to dealing with these was very rudimentary. For example, if we had a couple in a distribution center who would get into domestic fights at work, we’d just go in and separate them or we’d put them on different shifts. But these hadn’t been labeled in the company as domestic violence and something around which we needed a protocol. We didn’t think of these incidents this way until the team started its training and internal advertising.”*

This “naming” of domestic violence encouraged security professionals to regard such cases as their own category of security risk, and a serious one at that. In fact, when asked to consider how domestic violence threats relate to other risks managed by the corporation (including activities such as securing facilities world-wide, protection against terrorism, protecting corporate executives, ensuring safe international travel for employees), Mr. Giraldi rated domestic violence as among his top three security concerns. After 20 years of corporate security experience and ten years of experience as a law enforcement officer, he cites domestic violence as among the most dangerous situations in which to intervene, emphasizing the importance of systematic and ongoing threat assessment around this issue.

This new phase, in which employees are coming forward to seek assistance with IPV, also has created new challenges for the employer. One challenge is learning from each case so that a continuous improvement cycle is encouraged. As described by Mr. Butler:

*“The domestic violence response team reviews cases to make sure they are handled properly. We meet four to six times per year. We maintain a database of incident reports and when we meet we review past cases and open cases. We look for lessons learned, things that worked, and improvements that might be needed. We also assess whether additional training is needed. This ongoing review by the team is an integral part of the program.”*

Another challenge is one that is very familiar to advocates for abused women, the extended time frame that often is required for real change to take hold in abusive family situations. It is an interesting parallel to consider the time required for change to occur in organizational cultures and in the culture of abuse that ties many individuals to dysfunctional domestic situations. In both cases, the “fix” often takes longer than advocates would like. As stated by Ms. Randel:

*“The fact that it takes an average of seven times of coming and going in a relationship [before a victim leaves the perpetrator] means that it requires a lot of dedication on the part of the family, and certainly on the part of the employer. It could take someone years to get out of the relationship.”*

A further challenge faced by organizations that have created positive cultures around IPV assistance-seeking is that there are times in which assistance, no matter how concerted or well-intentioned, does not lead to positive outcomes. In other words, not all stories are success stories. Ms. Randel shared one such difficult case with us:

*“A bad story for us...there was a woman working at one of our locations who was married to a real menacing monster. An absolute, classic, horrible, battering monster. She came forward, or perhaps we found out because someone asked her if she was okay. It was very evident that, because he was an ex-cop, he had a badge and he was armed. It was a disaster from start to finish and I think ultimately she went out on disability leave and never came back. That is a sad story because she was terrified and we were really powerless to help her. I’m sure he would have killed her. So, those are the kind of cases that are really*

*difficult, when you're dealing with someone who is not afraid of you. Most of the time, the batterer has enough riding on his own reputation and career that restraining orders and fear of exposure work to curtail him from coming to work. But in this case this guy was just really a bad guy and it made him scary. It's bad for her because we really could have helped her and we don't know what happened to her. I guess in one way it's a good story, because we rid ourselves of a problem but that's not really our approach and our way of handling this."*

There also are success stories, however. Ms. Randel shared one of those with us:

*"We've had our share of instances where our policies probably helped save people's lives. One woman's estranged husband tried to show up at our distribution facility but because she had the foresight to give his picture, security wouldn't let him in. Then he got threatening and violent and the police were called and he ended up in an 11 hour standoff. Luckily she was fine."*

LCI has achieved significant success with institutionalizing IPV initiatives in their corporate culture. Yet there is a clear recognition among the executives interviewed here that ongoing success requires continual reinvestment and reevaluation. The former, continual reinvestment, is explained by Ms. Keurian:

*"I don't see our commitment to domestic violence diminishing in the future. It is beneficial to the company and to our employees. But we must be careful to make sure that as we move onto new work challenges and as new employees come on board that proper training and education continues. We need to make sure that we don't lull ourselves into complacency."*

The latter key to ongoing success, continual reevaluation of IPV programs and initiatives, has led to an expansion of focus beyond the borders of the United States. As described by Mr.

Butler:

*"We are now reaching out globally to other countries. Turkey and the United Kingdom are doing some incredible work. And in November I spoke in Jordan, with Queen Rania Al Abdullah there. This was a good dialogue and particularly important because this is a pretty taboo subject to talk about in Jordan."*

The experiences of pioneering companies such as Liz Claiborne, Inc. have laid the foundation for knowledge about how IPV-related issues can best be handled in work organizations. In the next section, we share more information about best practices.

## **BEST PRACTICES FOR MANAGEMENT OF IPV**

In 1995, an advocacy agency called the Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence (<http://caepv.org>) was created. The primary mission of this organization is to prevent IPV, but its approach to doing so distinguishes it from other domestic violence advocacy groups because it enlists the power and resources of the corporate community. Corporate members of CAEPV include companies such as Allstate Insurance Company, American Express Company, Archer Daniels Midland, CIGNA Corp., Kaiser Permanente, Lifetime Television, Liz Claiborne, Inc., Oxygen Media, State Farm Insurance Companies, Target Corporation, and Verizon Wireless, to name a few. As a result of members' experiences and experiments, CAEPV has developed best practices, organized into several key steps, for organizations wishing to address IPV in their work environments (see Randel & Wells, 2003, for additional information).

Before we share these best practices, one caution is important. As made evident in the case history of Liz Claiborne, Inc., it will be necessary for each organization to take its own personal journey toward addressing employees' IPV-related needs. In other words, there is not one specific program that will work in all organizations, nor are we cavalier about the challenges that exist around "institutionalizing" these types of initiatives. However, we hope that readers will balance the evident challenges against the benefits described earlier—the very real positive effects on the lives of individual employees and the financial benefits that will accrue to organizations that pursue IPV initiatives.

### **Step 1: Organize a multidisciplinary team to oversee the process.**

The CAEPV guidelines suggest that organizations should first establish a team that takes responsibility for the IPV program. The make-up of this team will depend on the structure of the organization involved, but the goal is to involve all relevant internal stakeholders. Professionals

from the following areas would be relevant team members: human resources, corporate security, legal services, internal communications, media relations, employee assistance programs, unions, threat assessment groups, and medical, health, or safety programs. The team's responsibilities should include both the planning of program implementation (identifying the dimensions of the plan, determining action steps for each dimension, establishing timelines and accountability), and planning for program assessment. It is important that the team reflect the unique characteristics and culture of the organization and that it be positioned as any other working team in the organization in order to establish its legitimacy. Finally, as with all organizational changes, it is critical that top management be involved in and champion these efforts.

Of course, not all organizations are of a sufficient size to have employee assistance programs, threat assessment groups, or corporate security offices. In such cases, companies must work with the resources that are available internally, as well as seek expertise externally. For example, small companies might seek the assistance of local law enforcement or of local IPV advocacy groups. Recall that one of the key insights for management at Liz Claiborne, Inc. was that there was support and expertise available in the local community that could be tapped.

## **Step 2: Develop a corporate policy addressing IPV.**

As with any human resource-related issue, it is important for the organization to provide guidance to employees about IPV through a written corporate policy. This policy should include information such as acceptable/unacceptable conduct, the assistance that is available for affected employees, and guidance about how managers and employees should handle cases of IPV. This guidance for employees is particularly critical. A recent study suggests that coworkers, not supervisors, are more likely to know when employees are experiencing IPV (Reeves & O'Leary-Kelly, 2007; Reeves et al., 2006). These coworkers may be unaware of the risks posed by such

situations (e.g., if an abuser keeps showing up at his wife's workplace) and may be uncertain about whether this information should be reported or to whom it should be reported. A corporate policy helps employees better understand their rights and responsibilities.

The multi-disciplinary team should be charged with developing this corporate policy, and there are several different models to be considered. In one model, the IPV policy might be included in the company's workplace safety or workplace violence policy. Under this approach, IPV is represented as one of multiple potential violence-related challenges faced by the organization. Some companies may be most comfortable with this approach because of the potential for overlap in recommendations across policies and the desire to simplify documents. Another model involves the creation of a separate IPV policy, which is the approach taken at Liz Claiborne, Inc. The good news is that sample policies are available—through organizations such as CAEPV and/or by contacting companies such as Liz Claiborne, Inc. which have established and well-tested policies.

The multi-disciplinary team must pay close attention to existing laws, which can vary greatly by city and state. Smaller organizations that do not have legal assistance available internally can seek information through the CAEPV, through local IPV advocacy groups, through IPV-related organizations such as the Family Violence Prevention Fund (<http://www.endabuse.org>), or through legal advocacy groups such as Legal Momentum (<http://www.legalmomentum.org>).

It is important to emphasize that organizational units whose operations are inherent to the policy should be fully engaged and prepared before the policy is widely shared. For example, if the policy suggests that managers report potentially threatening IPV-related cases to security, the security unit must have a response plan (e.g., know how to seek a restraining order, procedures

for sharing pictures of the abuser with security personnel). If the policy suggests that supervisors should seek guidance from human resource professionals when an employee discloses IPV, the HR group must be prepared to respond (e.g., understand how to balance privacy rights with security concerns, have a protocol for assisting the employee). Essentially, we are suggesting that it is critical not only for the policy to exist on paper, but for it to exist in the minds and in the standard practices of individuals who are charged with implementing elements of the policy.

### **Step 3: Provide training.**

The case history of Liz Claiborne, Inc. illustrates the importance of training. This company found that occasional training sessions geared toward generic family-related topics were neither well-received nor effective. However, when their training efforts focused more specifically on IPV in the workplace and when they were targeted company-wide, the results were much different. Specifically, employees began to understand the company's commitment and they began to disclose the challenges they faced around IPV. This disclosure allowed the organization to provide assistance that improved the ability of affected employees to be present and productive at work, and also avoided several potentially catastrophic violent outcomes.

Such training should begin with the interdisciplinary team and with corporate leaders and expand outward from there. The CAEPV suggests the following mantra for company training—"Recognize, Respond, Refer." This suggests that training should focus on helping managers and employees recognize the signs of IPV so they can anticipate when problems might arise. The next step in training is to help employees respond, that is, explaining what they should do if they suspect IPV or if an employee discloses IPV. Again, suggestions from the CAEPV can be very helpful as companies develop training content, as can the advice of domestic violence experts in the local community.

Finally, training should include information on how to refer. Referral can take various forms. Information on how employees (either IPV victims or concerned coworkers) can seek information internally (where do they go, how do they ask) is one aspect of referral. A second aspect relates to external referrals—that is, where can IPV-affected employees be referred to receive the potentially broad types of assistance they need (e.g., legal assistance, housing, counseling). As mentioned in the case of Liz Claiborne, Inc., the employer’s role is not to become an IPV expert or counselor or legal advisor. Rather, the employer’s role is to steer victims in the direction of help. Training on the meaning of “referral” is critical because all employees must understand this distinction. Anecdotally, there are many cases of coworkers who try to provide direct personal assistance (e.g., help a coworker move out of the abusive home, intercept an angry spouse who is coming to work, play the role of counselor). These practices, while well-intentioned, may create greater danger for the victim, for the coworker, and/or for the organization. Concerned coworkers must come to understand that their role is not to recognize, respond, and *react*, but to recognize, respond, and refer.

#### **Step 4: Build awareness through workplace communication.**

If “recognize, respond, refer” is the mantra for training, then “repeat, repeat, repeat” is the mantra for workplace communications. Employees will internalize those messages they encounter many times and in many different domains. So, information on IPV should be shared not only in formal training sessions, but in company orientations, on company websites, on the company intranet, in company newsletters, in company wellness materials, in safety materials, and on and on. Given that IPV is so closely connected to many issues around which regular communications occur (e.g., health issues, safety issue, quality of work life issues, benefits), it is not difficult to integrate IPV into ongoing communications. For example, as we entered the

office of Liz Claiborne, Inc. to interview Ms. Randel, we were interested to find that one of the first visual messages we encountered was a poster displaying information on IPV. Companies may wish to take advantage of materials (many of which are complimentary) available from IPV prevention groups, such as CAEPV, the Family Violence Prevention Fund, or local advocacy groups.

## **CONCLUSION**

We hope that readers will exit this article with several key learnings in mind. First, there is not an impermeable wall between home and work that prevents employers from recognizing IPV and the effect it has on the workplace. Second, no one expects employers to fix the problem of IPV. This is an intransigent social problem with complex causes and necessarily multi-faceted solutions. The employer's role is to care about the problem because it affects their employees and to be willing to recognize, respond, and refer. Finally, employers who are willing to take on this role should expect benefits not only for those employees affected by IPV, but for the organization generally. It is clear that the effects of IPV on the workplace are far-reaching, and so we can expect the benefits from IPV initiatives to be equally far-reaching.

**TABLE 1**  
**Current Victimization by Gender**

<b>Type of IPV</b>	<b>Male Employees</b>	<b>Female Employees</b>
Threats of physical harm	4.8%	7.0%
Stalking	2.1%	3.9%
Physical aggression	7.7%	6.0%
Hurt	2.6%	4.7%
Sexual abuse	1.1%	2.4%
<b>Total Victimized</b>	<b>10.3%</b>	<b>10.3%</b>

**TABLE 2**  
**Lifetime Victimization by Gender**

<b>Type of IPV</b>	<b>Male Employees</b>	<b>Female Employees</b>
Threats of physical harm	13.9%	29.1%
Stalking	11.9%	23.7%
Physical aggression	21.2%	28.0%
Hurt	8.8%	25.1%
Sexual abuse	1.9%	17.7%
<b>Total Victimized</b>	<b>19.3%</b>	<b>30.1%</b>

**TABLE 3**  
**Current victimization at work.**

<b>Type of Abuse</b>	<b>% of victims who experience this form of violence who report a workplace occurrence</b>
Threats	8.7
Stalking	50.6
Physical aggression	2.0
Hurt	2.2
Sexual Abuse	0
<b>Total % of victims reporting a workplace occurrence</b>	<b>19.2</b>

*This table is reproduced from Reeves, Bates, & O'Leary-Kelly (2006)*

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