# TELE GRAM



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# **CELEBRATING 50 EDITIONS OF THE TELEGRAM**

By Linda Komornik, TeleGRAM Editor

Our first issue of the TeleGRAM was released on March 1, 2014. It was published quarterly. Over the course of the past 8 years of publications, we have consistently featured industry news, hospitality tips and articles, best practices for all facets of the hotel business, and columns authored by Great American Hotel Group leadership. While the content has not veered far from the originally intended topics, the look of our newsletter has morphed to reflect a more modern appearance and the frequency has changed to bi-monthly. The focus is still to help property leaders better manage their asset, be more financially prudent, improve, manage and lead their human resources, and better attack sales strategies and individual markets.

# **Inside this issue**

LET'S CELEBRATE - 2

BY THE NUMBERS - 3

IAM HUMAN - 3

OPERATIONALLY SPEAKING
- 4

CELEBRATING SERVICE - 5

SELLING THE SIZZLE - 6

From the first edition to today's 50th edition, we are proud to be your management company. At any time, if you would like to go back and read any of our previous newsletters, please log on to our company website and under Services. click the on TeleGRAM Archive.

# FUN 50 FACTS

- 50 is the smallest number that can be divided by non-zero square numbers in two distinct ways.
- 50 is the atomic number of tin.
- 50 is the fifth magic number in nuclear physics.
- In Kabbalah, there are the 50 Gates of Wisdom and 50 Gates of Impurity.
- 50 is the traditional number of years in a jubilee period.
- The 50th day of Easter season is when Pentecost takes place.
- There are 50 states in the US.
- The TV show Hawaii Five-O was so called because Hawaii is the last of the 50 states.
- 50 is the equivalent percent commonly expressed as one half (50/50).
- 50 years signifies a golden anniversary.
- The number 50 signifies "new beginnings"
- Angel number 50 means healing of love and relationships. It also signifies hope and peace of mind.
- In numerology, 50 is a traditional birthday milestone.
- An ant can lift 50 times its own weight.
- There are 50 ways to leave your lover (if you believe Paul Simon).

#### **LET'S CELEBRATE**

#### CELEBRATION STATION

In case you want to celebrate, here is a list of National and "other" holidays: 9/5 - Labor Day; 9/8 Literacy Day; 9/11 - Remembrance Day; 9/13 - Positive Thinking Day; 9/19 - Dance Day; 9/29 - Confucius Day; 10/1 - International Coffee Day; 10/4 - Golf Day; 10/7 - World Smile Day; 10/15 - Sweetest Day; 10/17 - Bosses Day; 10/23 - Mother-In-Law Day; 10/31 - Halloween.

Remember salesmanship means being unique and standing out from the crowd. Some of these "days" will allow you to get your customer's attention in a positive and unique manner.

September is National Courtesy Month and Housekeeping Week is September 11-17.

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month and the first week of October is Customer Service Week.



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#### AROUND THE BLOCK

Wishing a "Happy Anniversary" to our Great American Hotel Group office and property GMs:

Jason Rickett - 4 years (September) Greg Smith - 3 years (September Suzanne Baele - 28 years (October) Gregory Teagarden - 3 years (October)

#### A LITTLE BIT WISER

Wishing a "Happy Birthday" to our Great American Hotel Group office and property GMs:

Gabrielle Smith - September 24

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### STANDING OUT FROM THE CROWD

Weird and wacky sales suggestions from Linda.

In August I sent out an email to property teams with several ideas for celebrating guests and making their stays more memorable. One idea was a "Take a Book/Leave a Book" shelf in your lobby. **September 8th is Literacy Day** - this would be a good time to start your book exchange!

**Dance Day is September 29th.** Why not hold an employee dance off for your team. It is a great way to exercise and helps associates stay active!

October 1st is International Coffee Day. Take a few minutes to feature several unique coffee "add-ins" to your complimentary coffee station. Everyone likes surprises and I think more than one of our customers will appreciate the treat.

**World Smile Day** should be celebrated every day, but on **October 7th** make a point of making people smile by starting with you and your team! Smiley buttons, emojis, and other smiling faces will go a long way to ensuring hospitality.

# SETTING YOUR TEAM UP FOR SUCCESS: PASSING THE QA

Ever heard the phrase "QA Everyday"? Managers and property leaders need to operate their hotels as if they expect the QA inspector to arrive everyday. That is what makes a good hotel stand out from the crowd. Engaged leadership, hands-on management, and loyal teams are proud to work in their hotels.

Here are a few tips for leaders to make sure that hotels are always putting their best foot forward:

- In daily stand ups, weekly/monthly departmental meetings, and manager hotel walk throughs, reinforce the fact that your customers are our most important QA inspectors.
- Every day pick something from the QA inspection and talk about how we accomplish the tasks. Make sure teams know the standards, have the tools to provide the standards, and have the desire to exceed our customer's expectations.
- Post the top point questions from the QA in the break room or back office and role play, discuss, and provide info to associates on how to "ace" these items.
- Take each departmental section of the QA and encourage department heads to talk about their sections in meetings.
- Pair up strong mentor associates with those who are not at the expected level of knowledge or service and encourage them to do better.
- Keep your QA book of information handy and up-to-date.
   Make sure that all Life Safety, Maintenance Contracts,
   Training Information, Contact Information, and other necessary documents are in one place, accessible to all managers in case a QA inspector arrives on your "day off".
- Teach associates not to fear inspections; teach them to want to show off how much they know and how good they do their job.
- Embrace your brand identity or pillars of service by providing motivational leadership.

# By The Numbers

#### GABRIELLE SMITH, CORPORATE CONTROLLER



With many factors affecting the hospitality industry, including the volatility we have experienced in the past few years, it will be challenging to budget for 2023 with certainty. The following are a few points to consider when brainstorming goals with your management company, and property leadership for 2023 budgets:

- Given increases in gas prices and stock market's hovering near bear-market territory, there is no sign that hotel demand is waning. Given this information, it should be noted that in the past, a steep decline in the S&P 500 has often caused RevPAR growth to decline. Watch the market and carefully budget these numbers!
- For drive-to leisure destinations, especially in high-end properties where consumers are less price sensitive, the impact of inflation may be less severe. On the other hand, budget-minded consumers who frequent select and limited service hotels are affected by higher gas prices, food costs and mortgage rates. In most cases, the hotels in our portfolio fall into the latter category and we should be mindful of not over-estimating demand.
- The CEO of Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) is quoted, "The factors impacting many industries around the world
  are also anticipated to impact global business travel recovery into 2025. The forecasted result is [that] we'll get close, but we
  won't reach and exceed 2019's pre-pandemic levels until 2026". If your hotel relies heavily on international business travel,
  we should be mindful of this prediction.
- Domestically, most brands in most locations are cautiously optimistic that business and leisure travel will continue to increase over 2022 levels. Look at your county and city Economic Department reports and trends and make estimations cautiously. Estimate your numbers based on numbers and don't sandbag.
- According to HOTSTATS, many companies are pushing from traditional methods of budget benchmarking to using
  operational information to minimize bottom line losses. This method is designed to optimize revenues to maximize profits
  and owners' returns. When preparing for the budget process, you should consider the following: Identify Performance Gaps,
  Outline Strategy (profit enhancements), Define KPIs (e.g. track trends vs. your comp set), take a Holistic Approach (each
  department involvement), and Review Trends moving forward, making modifications in expenses if revenues are in flux.

### I AM HUMAN, I AM A RESOURCE

SUZANNE BAELE, CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES



As hospitality professionals, we greet customers every day, we work closely with vendors, we develop relationships with sales reps that support the needs of our hotels, in other words we see all sorts of people day in and day out during the normal course of our businesses. Outsiders.

Did you know that a customer, a vendor, a rep. etc. can create a hostile environment for our associates by engaging in behavior that is of a harassing nature towards that associate? And are you aware that we are required to immediately take remedial action once this unwanted behavior is brought to our attention. In fact once we as managers are put on notice that harassment of any kind has occurred, we must address the complained behavior on behalf of our associate.

In these days of labor shortages, dealing with the fallout from the great resignation, and recruiting challenges for our industry, this is one critically important message you send to your staff when you address concerns of this nature promptly, confidentially. You are ensuring that your workplace is free from harassment of any kind and from anybody. You are not just talking the talk, you are walking the walk.

#### **HR Corner**

New Hot Line Phone Number guarantees total anonymity!

All complaints of harassment must be taken seriously and communicated to Suzanne Baele, Corporate Director of Human Resources at 603 | 978.3201

# HOTELIERS REACT TO NEW GOVERNMENT LODGING PER DIEMS

According to the top stories in Hotel News Now on August 26th,

"The U.S. General Services Administration's \$2 increase — from \$96 to \$98 — in lodging per diems in the continental U.S. for fiscal year 2023 received a less-than-excited response from hoteliers, reports HNN's Bryan Wroten."

"Some hoteliers say many hotels could end up shutting off negotiated rates for government employees in favor of higher-paying demand segments."

"Jennifer Driscoll, vice president of revenue management at McNeill Hotel Company, said while it's good that the rate increased after two years without any increases, the 2% rise for 2023 isn't proportional to the needs of hotels."

### **OPERATIONAL SPEAKING**

DAVE AKRIDGE PRESIDENT AND REGIONAL DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS







#### BE PREPARED FOR WEATHER EMERGENCIES!

Being prepared is half the battle. States and communities around the country are reviewing procedures, checking supplies, and conducting drills to make sure that their physical plant and staff are ready and able. While communities are preparing - hotels should also be prepared.

Here are a few useful tips for preparedness:

- Purchase (or review) flood insurance for your home/business and make sure premiums are paid and you are protected. There is a 30-day waiting period for flood insurance policies to take effect so plan ahead as most property policies do not include flood protection.
- Secure loose, lightweight objects such as patio/pool furniture, garbage cans, etc. inside. Trim or remove damaged trees and limbs close enough to fall on structures. Secure loose rain gutters and downspouts and clear any clogged areas of debris.
- Purchase/service portable/whole-house generator to use during power outages.
- Take photos and document the condition of your home/business prior to a storm to aid in future insurance claims.
- Document employee's responsibilities and role(s) before and review with each employee.
   Conduct drills and test your emergency plans to ensure staff comprehends their roles.
   Follow-up with an after action report and lessons-learned session.
- Contact your vendors to understand their preparedness plans and how a disaster will impact your supply chain.
- Relocate valuables and IT systems to the upper level of your facility, away from large windows and doors or to a more secure location if needed.
- Collect and store critical paperwork. Ensure vital records are protected: analyze your off-site backup record storage, place valuable documentation and digital storage in a waterproof, fireproof box.
- Create an "emergency kit". It can take several days or weeks for government services and assistance to reach you, depending on the severity of the storm and geographic location. Sample items include:
  - At least a 3-day supply of water and non-perishable food. Don't forget infant formula and diapers as well as pet food and supplies.
  - Medications for at least one week and copies of prescriptions. Prepare medical equipment, assistive technology and backup batteries. Double check first aid kit.
  - Have ample supply of flashlights/batteries as well as glow sticks. Double check tools, tarps, rope, and other items that might be needed. Make sure you have smart clothing available, sturdy shoes and/or boots, ponchos or rain gear.
  - Have emergency funds available to sustain your family or business for several days.
     Consider funds to cover fuel, lodging, and meals as well as pet boarding. Do not rely on credit or debit cards as critical networks such as Internet or electrical infrastructure may be damaged.
  - Make sure you have antibacterial soap and disinfectant, paper towels and toilet paper, bleach and rubbing alcohol, toothbrushes and toothpaste.
  - Write down and store phone numbers for emergency services, utilities and service providers (with account numbers), medical providers, veterinarians, insurance companies and other critical services.
  - Prepare extra cell phone charging devices and batteries, AM/FM radio, NOAA Weather Radio with additional batteries.

For more information on how to prepare your business, family and property against weather threats, visit your state emergency preparedness website.

# CELEBRATING SERVICE HEROES AMONG US

# WE DON'T SAY IT OFTEN ENOUGH - YOU AND YOUR TEAMS ARE AWESOME!

FAIRFIELD INN & SUITES MILLVILLE, NJ

From Tamika L: "I traveled to this hotel because I didn't want to stay near the beach in a hotel that was not well-kept or full of sand, as we did three weeks ago in Egg Harbor Township, NJ. I decided to travel a short distance away from Wildwood, to get a decent room with a good night's rest. Therefore, we checked into the Fairfield Inn at approximately 12:30am on the morning on July 30th.

I must admit I was skeptical due to traveling in the dark and that this hotel was hidden in the trees, but to my surprise when I arrived and then stepped into the hotel it felt like I was at home. Most hotels keep the lobby nice, but to my surprise the room was nice, clean, and well-kept with a splash of character.

In the morning, it was busy with individuals eating breakfast and leaving to go to the beach. When I approached the lobby again around 11:30am to leave, I noticed how clean the eating area, the kitchen and the sitting area was in such a short period of time. Therefore, I had to commend the staff and let them know what a beautiful job they were doing to keep this hotel looking beautiful and like home for people such as myself who really appreciated the extra effort.

It was truly amazing to see the mindset of the whole team working together to make the hotel shine for its guests. Thanks for the wonderful stay, I look forward to visiting again soon this summer."

#### \*\*\*\*\*

From J. Mark K: "Carissa and Kaylove, first and most importantly, thank you very, very much for the upgrade. It has been a tough couple of weeks regarding my wife's upcoming surgery so I really appreciated having the all the extra comfort to enjoy and relax. It amazes me how the two of you always have a smile on your face. Always go out of your way to address us all by name and most importantly always take time out of your busy work day to chat with us, ask how our families are doing and assist with all of our crazy demanding track schedules. Our reservations are always correct, keys usually ready when we arrive......all of which makes our stay that much better. We all feel like we are at home when we enter the Fairfield Millville. Thank you!"

#### SPRINGHILL SUITES ALTAMONTE SPRINGS, FL

Jesus C: "Thank you for all your help you guys are a wonderful team and I appreciate your attendance to small details as well as to larger details. Great service as well as great people"

# 15 KEY MARKETING TRENDS BRANDS NEED TO TAKE NOTE OF IN 2022

The following is an excerpt from an <u>article written by Robert Rauch</u> and published in Hotel News Now on August 24, 2022.

Before writing of the business plan, you must get the right people on board in the right place. Once the right people in place, it is critical to review macroeconomic data.

Leisure demand will continue to be strong, corporate/business travel will improve as will group travel, and this will result in a strong 2023 despite inflation, a recession or stagflation. Follow these five steps to complete a baseline business plan:

- 1. Review trend reports, which will indicate where your hotel is in its competitive set and what costs are incurred by every reservation. Hotel supply and demand, the competitive environment, action plans and expected results must be laid out. The action plan details who, what, when and all costs associated with each action. Keep it simple.
- 2. Develop a budget that will streamline operations and create strategic opportunities for hotels. Since we just came out of a pandemic, use caution with assumptions.
- 3. Coordinate multi-pronged marketing efforts by reviewing market intelligence and market pace reports carefully. Continuously create and deliver "can't-resist" content for websites and e-blasts. Post to social media at least two times per week to "tell the story." Make certain to have a public relations plan in place, with or without an agency to assist.
- 4. Implement a focused sales plan by reviewing competitor websites and all competitor social sites, including Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. Look at all previous business and examine key marketing reports. Strengthen community relationships and explore creative partnership opportunities and talk to guests because this leads to guest loyalty and provides timely insight on who is traveling.
- 5. Review revenue management tactics by conducting rigorous benchmarking, preparing accurate projections and developing a responsive new business mix. Positioning properties in the right channels allows us to increasingly provide guests with authentic connections. Many revenue systems are now looking into attribute-based shopping, according to a recent study by the American Hotel & Lodging Association.

### **SELLING THE SIZZLE**

#### LINDA KOMORNIK, CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF SALES & MARKETING



I know I sound like a broken record. However, I can assure you that the record is not broken, I just have it on "replay" because I like the song. It's important (IMHO) to re-emphasize what industry and management company professionals, articles about trends, and statistics from our revenue managers are saying and putting a few of new strategies in place at our hotels.

Today, yet another article was published regarding the slow recovery of Business Travel, and the "promise" that it will rally next year. Citing "Remote-Work Policies, Tech, and the State of Economy", this article echoes what many industry experts are predicting. None of them are optimistic that Q4 2022 will rally fast enough for our tastes (or bottom lines). Hotel demand from business travelers has been the slowest metric to bounce back since prepandemic and gone are the peak levels of occupancies from 2019.

Let's evaluate the 3 reasons for this lack of segment recovery:

1. Corporate and Company Work-From-Home Policies: The vast majority of US companies ARE traveling again. One projection predicts that hotels should recover by the "end of 2023". This is based in part on confidences that business executives will then (again) recognize the value of face-to-face meetings with partners and clients.

As the economy grows (see #3 below), businesses will most likely start hiring more people who will travel. Yes, many of existing company employees are back on the road, but not at the same frequency or volume as pre-pandemic. While Covid is no longer the most important factor in the business travel decision, staffing challenges and pricing, or inflation are considered significant factors when it comes to making business travel decisions. It has been noted that meetings this year will make up a greater share of business travel budgets versus individual travel.



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The shift in company policies away from requiring employees to work from home, to allowing remote work, could be helping business travel demand for hotels (think bleisure). Will that continue, and what is the long-term impact of working from home for hotels and meeting venues? What we do know is that associates like to travel but are getting comfortable working from home, using smart devices to do business, and enjoying the work-life balance that remote work allows. In this environment of their company's staffing challenges, why would they give this up? Perhaps only if they can tie business travel into leisure travel!



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**2. Teleconferencing Technology:** The true test of business travel will likely come starting in October - when leisure travel traditionally goes through a seasonal slowdown, schools have started, and we can see what's left of true business travel.

As teleconferencing technology improves and customers are more attuned to picking up the phone or using video call apps, the need for actual business travel could continue to wane. Watch the news from the airlines. As news and social media stories continue to exploit the travails of air travel (delays, staff shortages, weather), the increase in technology and teleconferencing may become the wave of the future and start to obliterate business travel. Where companies have traditionally sent 4-5 associates to a meeting or conference, they now, due to airfare prices and travel expenses, now send 1-2 people and offering dial-in opportunities to simultaneously view meetings/conferences for the balance of attendees.

Virtual conferences and meetings may have lost some of their allure as screen fatigue grows, but company controllers are still under pressure to cut travel budgets and limit hotel overnights for staff to attend face-to-face client meetings and major company events. Increased spending on technology – even if it means less investment by remote participants in the agendas and content of meetings subject matter – seems like a better long-term solution. So where does that leave hotels?

(Sell The Sizzle ... Continued from Page 6)

**3. Economic Slowdown:** Traditionally, most business travel has been to urban locations and middle of the weekdays (Monday through Wednesday). Year-to-date, the occupancy gap to pre-pandemic levels is widest at hotels in urban locations during this timeframe. While hotels in urban locations are trending in the right direction, they still had the greatest shortfall or gap to their 2019 business. Specifically, central business districts are seeing this as a pattern.

Weekend business however, has rallied and frankly, has met or exceeded 2019 levels. Traditional shoulder days (Sundays and Thursdays) have recovered almost as rapidly as weekends, and they've recovered more quickly than weekdays!



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Last-minute and loyalty points travel is up. One only has to look at our daily flash reports to see that the pandemic has not changed the amount of travel..... but it has changed people's perspective on travel. They want and expect an experience and are going to cash in on points to achieve that experience without breaking their travel bank. Travelers today are more innovative in how they cash in loyalty points. Adding in the leisure part of business trips should not be overlooked - even if it makes accounting complicated for hoteliers. Whether the buyer or seller is in command depends on the market. As we embrace the traditional start of RFP season, we must know and understand that our prices will be higher and customers will have to pay more. We cannot reduce the service levels and quality of customer service and will need to offset costs with rises in pricing.

Last issue - I wrote about BLEISURE TRAVEL and encouraged all hotels to explore these options with customers. Combining business and leisure travel - especially for the business traveler segment - is paramount to our hotels' success. The flexibility of remote work has also been a contributing factor for business travelers to extend their weekends to 3 or 4 days. According to STR, Sunday and Thursday hotel occupancy actually matched Friday and Saturday occupancies. They noted that hotels will continue to see what defines the 'new business traveler' and their travel patterns.

So, what can we do to fill Monday-Wednesday travel? Here are a few of my ideas:





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- Look for small blocks (i.e. 10 rooms or so) of base business at a modest rate that include ONLY weekday occupancies. Think training, business openings, and construction crews. Negotiate Sunday arrivals and Thursday departures.
- Create packages for business travelers that occupy rooms Monday through Wednesday nights and bundle in meals, snacks, activities, to make their trips "almost homelike." Provide discount coupons to nearby eateries or drinkeries to business travel packages. Work with delivery services such as Uber Eats, Door Dash, or other popular companies to allow guests to order before they leave the office so that dinner is delivered when they are back in the hotel. Encourage guests to bring their delivered meals down to the great room and join other road warriors for a BYOD (Bring Your Own Dinner) gathering. Set up your community table in the breakfast room, play good music, and have GSRs talk about your dinner gatherings at check-in. Post information and do in-room or elevator signage (following brand standards). Another idea is to ask local notables to come in and lead conversations about the area history or fun or seasonal topics during these dinner events.
- Call local yoga or dance instructors and offer them "free" studio space in
  your meeting room if they host a class at your hotel. These classes can be
  early morning or evening times but on consistent days each week. Their
  local students can still attend classes, but ensure they provide opportunities
  for hotel guests to join the class to make up for what they might be missing
  at home.

The possibilities are endless. They just require a little elbow grease and creative thinking. Put yourself in their position: if you were not at home with your family and away from your normal routines, what would you rather do? Would you prefer to sulk alone in your hotel room watching endless reruns of the Golden Girls or join a group of individuals in a common area to break up the monotony of business travel?

I know what I would do.... happy planning!



## **DAILY STAND UPS - SUGGESTED AGENDA ITEMS**

Every day, it is important for our teams to start the day on a positive and proactive note. Daily Stand-Ups, Huddles, or what ever you choose to call the meeting is typically required by your brand and part of your quality inspection check-list.

Several examples of "what to cover" in these meetings would be:

- Communicating information to all departments and discussing the who's, what's, where's, how's and why's regarding guest and hotel info.
- Reviewing and promoting brand standards.... especially changes in protocols. This is also a great time to discuss items that may be your team's shortfalls and where your hotel needs to improve.
- Opportunity to practice as a team and reinforce service training.
- Opportunity to activate brand culture and start each day with positive energy.
- Recognize and reward each other for reaching goals or milestones, reviewing positive guest comments and testimonials.

This is also a great time to talk about who is checking in, review expected groups or VIPS, discuss specific room assignments for notable guests, and review rooms that are OOO or need extra attention. Sales managers should talk about specific meetings or groups, social groups (brides/grooms, special occasions, etc.) so as to prep GSRs for warm, welcoming conversations at the front desk. Managers should discuss occupancies, the "rate of the day", and/or discuss service recovery moments.

Daily Stand-Ups are also great learning opportunities for your team. Perhaps one of your team is fluent in another language. Sharing important words or phrases in their language (welcome, thank you, hello, good-by, sorry) are just a few ways that show that we have taken an extra step in our journey to provide exceptional customer service.

Don't forget topics such as how to handle affinity groups such as LGBTQ, Veteran's or guests with disabilities. Maybe learning basic words in sign language would be helpful, knowing the do's and don't's of guest interaction goes a long way with both cultural demands and respect.

Rotate who leads these meetings. Mondays could be Sales, Tuesdays could be Front Desk, Wednesdays could be Housekeeping, Thursdays could be Maintenance, and Fridays could be GMs! Get everyone involved. Post agendas in a notebook, on a clipboard, or in a file folder and keep them where all associates can review them. Ask participants to initial the Daily Sheet to keep track of attendees.

Lastly, don't make these daily meetings "yelling or disciplinary sessions". These daily huddles are designed to be informative, proactive, educational, and informative. They will set the stage for teamwork and leadership!



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<u>Link to purchase book.</u>