

## Providing Effective Faculty Feedback and Review: A Case Study from a Balanced Teaching, Research, and Service Setting

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**Abstract:** Faculty reviews are a fact of life at most universities. These reviews can be mandatory or optional; be based on teaching, research or service; occur annually, less often, or only when triggered by some event or lack thereof; and be supportive or punitive. This article examines the myriad faculty reviews at one Midwest University with the intent to start a discussion on the basic question of whether faculty reviews are effective or over-used. To help guide this study, the researchers also use best practices from the employee feedback literature to analyze the effectiveness of the school's current review processes.

**Key words:** faculty review, feedback, promotion and tenure

### 1. Description of the School and its Tenure and Promotion Criteria

This article provides a case study of faculty review at the School of Business (SOB) at a typical mid-size Midwestern university — Indiana University Southeast (IUS). IUS is one of eight Indiana University (IU) campuses and therefore subject to regulations of the entire IU system. IUS has just over 7,000 students. The average student age is 25 and students take on average about six years to complete an undergraduate college degree.

The SOB has 30 tenure track faculty. Faculty must apply for tenure in their sixth year and then may apply for full professorship after four more years. As of fall 2010, the SOB had 13 professors, 12 associate professors, and 5 assistant professors.

Faculty procedures are delineated in three documents. The document with the highest authority is the Indiana University Academic Handbook (AH). The Academic Handbook addresses issues such as promotion and tenure, but leaves the details for the individual campuses to decide. As an example of how these documents relate and address issues, following are excerpts about research requirements for tenure. This is the AH position:

#### 1.1 Criteria for Tenure

After the appropriate probationary period, tenure shall be granted to those faculty members and librarians whose professional characteristics indicate that they will continue to serve with distinction in their appointed roles....Each campus on which tenure is held (and other units as appropriate, e.g., school, college, department) shall have a document that states with reasonable specificity the standards that will be used to evaluate whether candidates meet the criteria for tenure. The document(s) must comply with the standards of the University and should make their application more specific. The chief academic officer on each campus is charged with the

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responsibilities of (1) reviewing such documents with respect to whether they are consistent with such documents at higher levels, and (2) maintaining a current file of such documents. ...

Tenure considerations must recognize the diversity of the missions and the contexts of the campuses of the University and must not ignore the mission of the particular unit as defined in its statement of criteria and procedures and the individual's contribution to that mission. Tenure will generally not be conferred unless the faculty member or librarian achieves, or gives strong promise of achieving, promotion in rank within the University (IU Academic Handbook, 2008, p. 76).

Thus, the AH provides only the most general guidance on research needed for tenure and leaves the specifics to the individual campuses. These campuses are to determine tenure research requirements based on the mission of that campus (as that mission relates to teaching, research, and service).

The IUS Faculty Manual provides more detailed insight into the tenure decision:

Within the context of the mission of Indiana University Southeast, we recognize teaching, scholarship, and service are central to the work of faculty. When considering criteria for promotion and tenure, there are general expectations about accomplishments in these areas that are applicable across the campus. But it is also recognized that the academic units differ sufficiently to require that the specific applications be developed in each school/discipline. Therefore, this document specifies the criteria defined in terms of general standards based on the common goals we share. The more explicit and detailed formulation of the criteria is formulated by each school/discipline... Regardless of the school or discipline, however, an assessment of the performance of a tenure-track faculty member in all three of these areas or a non-tenure track faculty member in teaching and service will serve as the basis for the promotion and tenure evaluation process....

## **1.2 Scholarship**

Scholarship entails systematic inquiry or performance, attainment of a level of expertise through active involvement, and communication of that expertise to others. An effective scholar:

- continues to develop an identified area(s) of expertise;
- contributes to this area through a systematic body of work; and
- shares contributions with professionals beyond the campus through publications, exhibits, presentations at professional meetings, and documentation of application of expertise to applied situations (Indiana University Southeast, Faculty Manual 2010, pp. 30–31).

While the IUS Faculty Manual provides a little more specificity than does the Academic Handbook, there is still much room for interpretation and refinement. The Faculty Manual leaves this refinement to the individual school or discipline. Hence, the SOB has a Faculty Development Plan (FDP) which addresses, among other things, research requirements for tenure.

The following represents standard expectations for tenure, promotion to associate professor, full professor, and senior lecturer. *Achievement of minimums does not ensure tenure or promotion...* The criteria below represent SoB-specific requirements. Candidates are expected to be familiar with promotion and tenure requirements described in the IUS Faculty Manual. Even though faculty may achieve the generally expected number of points in any period of time, they should maintain an active research agenda. The combination of securing expected points and not maintaining an active research agenda may result in a negative tenure decision. For example, securing the expected number of points in a two year period, and remaining stagnant for three years would weigh negatively on any tenure decision...

### **1.3 Promotion to Associate Professor and Tenure**

The standard expectation for promotion to associate professor and tenure is 40 points, 30 of which should come from peer reviewed journal articles.

The listing of points can be found on the Maintenance of Academic or Professional Qualifications list. (Indiana University Southeast SOB FDP, 2010, pp. 4–5)

The SOB has two committees related to faculty development. Faculty development policy originates with the Participants Team which crafts and refines content of the Faculty Development Plan. The FDP addresses topics of hiring, Academic Qualifications (AQ) and Professional Qualifications (PQ), 3rd year review, tenure and promotion, post-tenure review, peer review, and mentoring. The School Review Committee (SRC) implements these policies. The membership of each committee changes annually.

The FDP is fairly specific as to how heavily peer reviewed journal articles weigh in the tenure decision. The FDP goes on to specify what constitutes a peer review:

Generally, intellectual contributions should meet two tests:

- Exist in public written form, and
- Have been subject to scrutiny by academic peers or practitioners prior to publication.

Peer review is defined as a process of independent review prior to publication of a faculty member's work by an editorial board/committee widely acknowledged as possessing expertise in the field. The peer review should be independent; provide for critical but constructive feedback; demonstrate a mastery and expertise of the subject matter; and be undertaken through a transparent process notwithstanding that the individuals involved may be anonymous. Such a review ensures the work is subjected to the expected "scrutiny by academic peers or practitioners prior to publication". Peer review is one important way in which the individual and institution can demonstrate overall quality of intellectual contributions (Indiana University Southeast SOB FDP, 2010, p. 11).

As the above sections describe, SOB faculty have several documents, at three distinct levels, which delineate faculty activities and expectations. The above description therefore provides an overview of the review process at this institution for one purpose, tenure and promotion, as an example of documents and procedures in place for faculty reviews.

Faculty members are subject to several different types of review. Table 1 summarizes the reviews, their time frames, the areas of performance subject to review, who conducts the review, and who (if anyone other than the faculty member) receives the review report. The Faculty Development Plan addresses all of the required reviews. The FDP is the master document for policies and procedures of the SOB, including tenure and promotion, annual reviews, peer reviews, research release, post-tenure review, faculty mentoring, and AQ requirements. This article will explore the reviews, providing some history on them, but prior to doing so will examine some of the key findings from the employee feedback literature.

## **2. Best Practices for Effective Feedback**

Over the past several decades, a number of researchers have studied the impact of feedback on employee performance. Approximately one century ago, James (1890) and Thorndike (1913) were among the first to explore the topic. Indeed, the stream of research has continued into the modern era which includes seminal works such as Kluger and Denisi's meta-analysis in 1996.

As Kluger and Denisi observed, management theorists have examined feedback as a theoretical construct in a variety of different contexts. These studies include “*goal setting theory* (Locke & Latham, 1990); *control theory* (Annett, 1969, Podsakoff & Farh, 1989); *social cognition theory* (Bandura, 1991), and a variant of *learned helplessness theory* (Mikulincer, 1994)” (taken from Kluger & Denisi, 1996).

While these studies have at times yielded divergent results, some consensus has emerged as to best practices for providing effective employee feedback. For example, most agree that the feedback needs to be administered frequently and in a timely manner (Salmoni et al., 1984; Bilodeau, 1966). While others have suggested that feedback can sometimes be administered too frequently (e.g., Lurie & Swaminathan, 2008) because it can create “noise” in the process, this does not diminish the importance of timely feedback. It simply illustrates that feedback can potentially be overdone.

There is also general agreement that feedback needs to be accurate and without bias (O’Reilly & Anderson, 1980). One relatively recent tool that has been shown to lead to positive performance is the 360 degree performance appraisal (Atwater, Roush & Fischthal, 1995; Reilly, Smith & Vasilopoulos, 1996; Brett & Atwater, 2001). Such a system is also thought to increase accuracy and reduce bias because it gathers feedback from multiple raters at multiple times and then provides it to the individual (Bernardin & Beatty, 1984; Cederblom & Lounsbury, 1980). Lastly, there is evidence that the value of feedback, especially performance based feedback, is enhanced to the extent that it is constructive in nature (Halperin et al., 1976) and also provides/requires reflection and a strategy for improvement (Daudelin, 1996).

Taken together, this suggests that in order to be effective, feedback must:

- (1) Be timely and consistent
- (2) Be accurate and without bias
- (3) Be provided by multiple evaluators at multiple times
- (4) Be constructive in nature
- (5) Allow for reflection and corrective action

In the sections that follow, this paper will first list and describe the various aspects of the IUS review program and will then assess their effectiveness relative to the degree to which they comply with these five best practices. This analysis can help provide insight as to whether the program is truly a value added undertaking or if it is instead an inefficient use of participants’ time and efforts.

### **3. Mandatory Reviews**

#### **3.1 Annual Review**

All full-time faculty (tenure track and lecturers) are required to submit annual reports identifying their accomplishments in the areas of teaching, research, and service. While the suggested format for these reports is standardized, faculty develops their own reports using the format they determine is most appropriate. Student evaluations of teaching (SETs) can be a component, but are not required disclosure (more detail below).

The stated policy of the SOB is to evaluate tenure track faculty performance on the basis of 50% teaching, 25% research, and 25% service. (Although faculty may opt to increase research to 35% and reduce service to 15%, at least in theory.) The Dean meets with faculty in March or April every year to discuss the report and the Dean’s evaluation of faculty annual performance. Due the increased demands on the Dean’s time and the growing number of SOB faculty, as of 2012, the Dean meets annually only with “select” faculty.

### **3.2 Third Year Review**

Tenure track faculty prepare a dossier in their third year, similar to the one they will prepare for the tenure and promotion process and submit this dossier to the SRC for review. This review is a mini version of the tenure and promotion review, but the review report goes only to the School of Business Review Committee and the faculty member. The SRC tends to take a hard look at faculty accomplishments in an effort to prepare the faculty for the tenure and promotion process (i.e., let the faculty know of areas of weakness).

### **3.3 Promotion and Tenure Review**

Candidates must come up for tenure in their sixth year, based on performance in their first five years. Candidates can come up earlier for promotion to Associate Professor, especially if they negotiated that possibility during the hiring process. Candidates have one opportunity for tenure. Most faculty members also use their tenure dossier for their application for associate professor, but faculty can opt to go up for associate professor in their fifth year.

This dossier has three main components — a narrative (or overview) limited to ten pages, the body of the dossier limited to 100 pages, and supplemental material unlimited in volume. The limit on the body of the dossier is a relatively new criterion in response to a few faculty providing bins of information they wheeled to the Office of Academic Affairs in support of their dossier.

Additionally, faculty are expected to provide names of peers that can review their research and make a recommendation to the committee. Recently IUS adopted the policy of IU — Bloomington and required four of these independent reviews of research for each promotion/tenure case. The guidelines state that the reviewers should not have any formal relationship with the candidate (e.g., co-author, advisor, colleague) at any time prior to providing the review.

Ultimately, faculty are evaluated on the basis of their teaching, research, and service (TRS). In order to be promoted successfully, faculty have to earn at least one “Excellent” rating and can receive no ratings lower than “Satisfactory”, although it is unlikely that a faculty member receiving an Excellent in Service only will meet the requirements for tenure and promotion. While there are guidelines provided as to the format of the dossier, there are not specific requirements as to the information that must be presented. Essentially, the faculty member has almost complete discretion about what to include.

At the same time, it is up to the faculty member to provide compelling evidence on the effectiveness of his/her teaching, research and service record. Relying solely on required evaluations (such as SETs) is insufficient for documenting excellence. Accordingly, most faculty seek out other forms of evaluation to help provide sufficient evidence of excellence.

### **3.4 Promotion to Full**

Promotion to full professor closely follows the earlier promotion decision in procedure. Faculty report only teaching, research, and service accomplished since they submitted their promotion to associate dossier.

### **3.5 Teaching Peer Review**

In an effort to make SOB faculty more accountable and to help improve teaching, the SOB faculty implemented a Teaching Peer Review policy in 2000. Initially, faculty received a peer review every three years from a non-SOB faculty certified by the campus’ Institute for Learning and Teaching Excellence (ILTE). Due to the limited number of such certified faculty, faculty now receives a peer review every five years with a preference

for a reviewer outside the SOB. Faculty responses to the peer reviews in their annual reports, but need not provide a copy of the peer review itself.

### **3.6 AQ/PQ Review**

The IUS School of Business is Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) accredited. To maintain this accreditation IUS must meet specific standards for all aspects of TRS, along with other criteria such as student teacher ratios, computer facilities, library resources, etc. Faculty must be either academically qualified or professionally qualified. This distinction is important because the SOB must maintain minimum standards of AQ/PQ as a percent of faculty to maintain the AACSB accreditation. In response to this AACSB requirement, the IUS faculty devised a formal system for evaluating AQ status (the more common track for IUS tenure track faculty) and outlined the process in the FDP.

Currently, the minimum research output is two refereed journal articles and some supporting material (e.g., conference presentations, proceedings) in any rolling five year period. More specifically, the Participants Team created a point system (recently revised) that assigns a predetermined number of points for each scholarly contribution. To maintain AQ status, faculty must earn a minimum of 30 points over a five year rolling period. For those teaching in the SOB Graduate Programs, at least 20 points must come from peer reviewed journal articles. For all others, at least 10 points must come from peer reviewed journal articles. For scholarly articles, there is a points weighting system: 12 points for an article published in a journal with an acceptance rate lower than 20%, 10 points if the journal has an acceptance rate between 20% and 80%, and 8 points if the journal has an acceptance rate of 80% or above. Other scholarly activities also earn points. Commonly assigned points include 20 points for a first edition of a scholarly book, 5 points for full papers published in conference proceedings or for published book reviews, 2 points for initial presentations of an executive education program, and one point for a brown bag presentation to peers or for serving as a session chair at an academic conference.

The Dean and the AACSB coordinator review faculty quarterly to determine who is borderline on maintaining AQ/PQ status. While the minimum standards for promotion and tenure are similar to the AQ standards, the two sets of standards are not explicitly connected. It is quite possible that a faculty member be considered AQ and still not merit an “Excellent” on research when being considered for tenure/promotion. The point system can therefore provide a general understanding as to how a faculty member is doing with regard to meeting minimum expectations, but it in no way guarantees a successful tenure decision.

### **3.7 Research Release**

Officially, IUS faculty teach a 4/4 load (four courses each fall and spring). Faculty receive a one course release each semester for research, resulting in a 3/3 load. The SRC reviews every SOB faculty member on a rolling three year cycle to determine if faculty members are performing research at a level necessary to justify their research release.

While no SOB faculty has recently lost their research release time, there is some contradiction between this review and AQ/PQ review. If a faculty member does not perform research that justifies research release, the outcome may include a loss of research release time that would require him/her to return to a 4/4 teaching load. A heavier teaching load could well lead to even lower research output by the faculty. This outcome would, however, put the faculty’s AQ/PQ status in jeopardy and ultimately jeopardize the SOB’s good standing with accreditation.

### **3.8 Student Evaluation of Teaching**

Students evaluate faculty in each of their classes. There is a standard set of approximately 25 default questions. The instructor can choose to add additional questions to the standard 25. Because the SETs are the property of the faculty member, there is no mandate that faculty share the evaluations with anyone, although most faculty members do turn in their SETs to the Dean as part of their annual review dossiers. If faculty share summary SET results, the expectation is that faculty will provide full disclosure of all of the SET summaries.

## **4. Potential Additional Non-Voluntary Reviews**

### **4.1 Faculty Board of Review**

Faculty who are denied promotion or tenure have another opportunity for review on the IUS campus. The Faculty Board of Review (FBR) reviews faculty promotion or tenure applications that received a negative review on the IUS campus. The FBR mainly restricts its activities to questions of review process and not merits of the dossier.

### **4.2 Post-tenure Review**

The IU Board of Trustees mandated that faculty at all campuses will be subject to post tenure review, but left the determination of what triggers a review, remediation, and punitive aspects of the review to the campuses and schools. The SOB requires faculty to enter post tenure review when a faculty member receives two consecutive unsatisfactory ratings in their annual report in any one area of Teaching, Research, and Service. The faculty must then develop a recovery plan subject to the SRC's and Dean's approval. Failure to develop or complete such a plan can result in the faculty member facing IUS post-tenure review. In this review, faculty members can be discharged for "dereliction of duty".

## **5. Voluntary Reviews**

For tenure and promotion, faculty must earn at least one 'excellent' rating in teaching, research or service. Required evaluations alone will not make that case. Therefore many faculty seek out voluntary reviews. These reviews provide additional, independent evidence of excellence. These are some of the more popular common reviews.

### **5.1 Trustees Teaching Award**

Starting in 2001 the IU Board of Trustees designated that a small percentage of IU faculty would receive annual competitive teaching awards of \$3,000. On the IUS campus generally ten faculty win the award each year. Appendix A provides the evaluation/scoring template. The campus Improvement of Learning Committee, including faculty from each school on campus, examines and grades dossiers and determines the recipients.

### **5.2 IUS Teaching Award**

Each year one IUS faculty member receives the outstanding teacher award based on cumulative teaching performance. The Improvement of Learning Committee also designates this award winner, based on a dossier covering the recipient's body of work since employment with IUS.

### **5.3 IUS Research Award**

Each year one IUS faculty member receives the outstanding researcher award based on cumulative research

performance. The campus Research and Grants Committee reviews candidate dossiers.

#### **5.4 Faculty Colloquium on Excellence in Teaching (FACET)**

FACET is an honorary IU teaching society started in 1989. FACET admits up to two percent of IU faculty each year. Applicants submit dossiers and peer review letters of support to the campus selection committee and then to the statewide FACET Selection Committee in accordance with guidelines published on the FACET website. (<http://www.iupui.edu/~facet/>) Committee members examine each applicant for support of excellent teaching.

### **6. Formal Mentoring Program**

While not a form of evaluation per se, IUS has a formal mentoring program in which all full time lecturers and tenure track faculty members participate. The program has numerous purposes. Included among them is creating an opportunity for the new faculty to learn about the history and culture of the institution. In addition, mentees can turn to their mentors for advice on any number of topics regarding teaching, research, and service. While not required, some mentors have served as informal evaluators of their mentees' teaching and have written them letters of recommendation in support of their promotion/tenure efforts.

### **7. The IUS Faculty Review Program Relative to Employee Feedback Best Practices**

Based on the criteria previously outlined, the IUS faculty review program has a number of definite strengths. Here is a discussion of some of these strengths.

#### **7.1 Timeliness/Consistency of the Feedback**

The IUS program entails eight forms of mandatory reviews. In total, any given faculty member can expect to experience approximately 40 reviews (with the majority of them being student evaluations) before the final tenure decision. Additionally, there are four types of voluntary reviews that new faculty on the tenure track may undergo. There are two other potential reviews that a promotion/tenure candidate might face if they receive an initial unfavorable evaluation.

These are spread out over the course of a (roughly) six year period. While some of the items are one time occurrences (i.e., the third year review and the promotion/tenure decision), others occur on a much more regular basis. Student evaluations happen every semester in each course. The Dean's review happens once a year. The peer review of teaching and the AQ/PQ and research release reviews take place every four or five years. In the formal mentoring program, mentors, mentees, and presenters meet once a month in the Spring and Fall semesters and informally as needed.

This means that, at most, faculty members go four months without the opportunity for some form of feedback. Furthermore, the reviews happen at the same times every year, therefore providing great consistency. While it may be a fair question to ask whether 40+ reviews over a six year period falls into the category of too much feedback, research findings (i.e., Salmoni, 1984) suggest it does not. While Lam et al. (2011) found that it was possible for too much feedback to occur, even their study indicated that there was a curvilinear relationship between feedback frequency and job performance, and that feedback was too frequent primarily when it was administered repeatedly over a very short period of time.

#### **7.2 Accuracy of the Feedback/Absence of Bias**

One way IUS has tried to eliminate bias and improve feedback accuracy is to select some reviewers that are



unknown to the faculty member. In addition, these reviewers have no ties to that faculty member. These independent reviews evaluate the faculty members' research productivity as part of the tenure decision and are a conscious attempt to reduce or eliminate bias in the tenure/promotion process.

As for the other faculty reviews, it is difficult to measure them directly for accuracy and lack of bias. However, one way to reduce the likelihood of bias and to improve accuracy is to use multiple raters.

### **7.3 Multiple Raters/Multiple Times**

By the time faculty come up for tenure, they have had reviews by dozens of different individuals. While the vast majority of these evaluators were students, there were typically 25 or more peer reviewers as well. While it is certainly allowable for their peers to serve on more than one review committee for any given faculty member, in practice, the makeup of these committees is often completely different.

Furthermore, although many of the reviews are housed within the School of Business, several others are not, including the campus review for tenure and promotion and the peer review of teaching. These evaluators must come from peers who are not members of the School of Business. Having multiple raters evaluate the faculty does not eliminate the possibility of bias, but it is unlikely for the entire institution to all be biased against the faculty member. Using multiple reviewers should not only reduce the chance of bias but should increase the overall accuracy of the evaluations.

### **7.4 Be Constructive in Nature**

Faculty reviews that are formative rather than summative, are constructive in nature. Most IUS reviews are formative.

As an example, the formal SOB mentoring program provides constructive feedback the faculty member can use to grow and develop. Similarly, the required peer review of teaching is explicitly a formative assessment tool. It is designed to point out both strengths and potential areas for improvement in a way that will help faculty members hone their teaching skills. The Dean's review also focuses on areas for improvement and is not designed to be punitive.

Several reviews must be summative, because of their intent or goal. These include the actual tenure decision, the faculty board of review, and the research release review. These reviews are not designed to comment positively on past performance or to provide suggestions for improvement. Instead, these reviews evaluate performance and render judgments.

### **7.5 Allow for Reflection and Corrective Action**

Most of IUS's reviews either explicitly require this reflection or strongly encourage it. Perhaps the best example is the peer review of teaching. While faculty are not required to share the results, if they choose to do so, they are asked to write about changes they made as a result of their reflection upon the feedback.

In a similar vein, an important part of documenting teaching excellence is for the faculty member to illustrate how s/he received the information, reflected on it, and made changes as a result of it. The third year review provides an excellent opportunity for reflection and improvement as the third year review is explicitly designed to identify areas for improvement regardless of current faculty performance. The SRC encourages the reviewed faculty members to reflect upon the review comments and design action plans to address any perceived deficiencies.

## 8. Discussion

IUS has a comprehensive system of faculty review using both formal and informal evaluations conducted regularly throughout a faculty member's career. IUS' evaluation mechanisms reflect the school's balanced emphasis on teaching, research, and service.

Before a new faculty member goes up for a promotion/tenure decision, they have already been evaluated numerous times in a wide variety of ways. With required annual reviews by the Dean, a comprehensive third year review, two peer reviews of teaching, and ongoing feedback from students, faculty members have ample opportunity to gauge where they stand in relation to promotion/tenure guidelines. Faculty have opportunities to seek out additional (optional) evaluative tools and the opportunity to receive feedback from a mentor.

These reviews follow many of the best practice suggestions for providing meaningful feedback. Reviews are timely and offered on a consistent basis. Reviews are as accurate and free from bias as possible. Most reviews are constructive and allow for reflection and corrective change.

Constructing the reviews in this manner provides a number of benefits. For example, faculty members under this system know where they stand long before the tenure and promotion process begins, and they can use numerous resources to address any noted deficiencies. Therefore, the SOB has a strong track record for faculty members achieving tenure and promotion out of those applying. Of the SOB faculty members who applied for tenure and promotion during the past ten years, all have been successful.

While the school is proud of these numbers, there is also a realization that improvements are always possible, that is why the SOB recently revised the mentoring program and the AQ/PQ point system. Also the Participants Team, the Dean, and other administrators continually review faculty development processes.

Changes are faculty driven. The same faculty who successfully went through the review process are subsequently responsible for updating and improving that system. IUS' current faculty review system, while working successfully today, may look quite different in the future. Therefore, the intent of this paper is to provide general insight and guidance into developing a review program and is not meant to be construed as a "one size fits all" solution.

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