

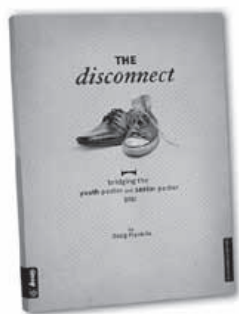
# THE *disconnect*



bridging the  
**youth** pastor and **senior** pastor  
gap

by  
Doug Franklin





Every time you walk out of your senior pastor's office, you leave with a sense of bewilderment and confusion. "Did I just waste the last hour? Did he really hear what's going on with our students? Is youth ministry really a priority for this guy?"

Unfortunately, you aren't alone. When it works, the relationship between a youth pastor and senior pastor opens the door to dynamic ministry in the local church. But when that relationship is weak, damaged, or broken, it can create an environment that breeds frustration, dissension, and burnout.

And in far too many churches, that relationship *is* weak, damaged, or broken. Trust, respect, and sacrifice don't happen when we aren't on the same page. Doug writes directly to you as a youth pastor, offering his encouragement and wisdom.

Doug Franklin and the team at LeaderTreks tackle the challenge of restoring that relationship in *The Disconnect*, a unique resource that brings together youth pastors and senior pastors for honest dialogue on the tough task of working together.

In this book, you'll discover:

- How to more effectively communicate with your senior pastor
- How core values can lead to greater respect
- Why ministry and money can't be separated
- How to align your expectations
- Why a shared mission is essential

If you're on the verge of a breakdown or ready to quit because you just can't take it anymore, you'll want to read this book. Your working relationship might still be restorable. And if it isn't, you can absorb and apply these truths in future ministry settings.

If you and your senior pastor already communicate and work together well, this book will help you solidify that relationship. You can take something good and make it great.



Doug Franklin is the president of LeaderTreks, an innovative leadership development organization focusing on students and youth workers. He and his wife, Angie, live in West Chicago. Doug grew up in Illinois and is a graduate of Wheaton College. His passion is using experiential learning to help students and adults grow as leaders. Doug writes about leadership on his blog at [dougfranklinonline.com](http://dougfranklinonline.com).

## **The Disconnect**

### **Bridging the Youth Pastor and Senior Pastor Gap**

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## **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to my beautiful and creative wife,  
Angie, who helped with this book more than you'll ever know.  
Thank you, sweetheart.

—Doug



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youth pastors

# Start Here...

It was my first youth ministry job where I was the lead youth worker. The church was only a couple of years old and didn't yet have a senior pastor, but my youth ministry was thriving. Countless kids, church and un-church, were deepening or starting their relationship with Christ. I loved my job, but I knew I needed wisdom and mentoring. Needless to say, I was thrilled when the elders told me they were hiring a senior pastor. Even more exciting was that the new senior pastor was a former youth pastor and a well-known youth speaker. I envisioned a partnership in which he would not only lead me but also mentor me in ministry and in life. Together we would form the foundation of an amazing team, bringing people from all over our city through the doors of our church and into a relationship with Jesus. Our mission would move forward because we would be united.

When the senior pastor arrived, I was already busy planning a mission trip for my group. Having gotten approval from two dads who had been overseeing me, I presented my plan to the senior pastor, and to my delight he told me to "go for it." I continued my planning and even bought a flight ticket (with my senior pastor's approval) to set up the mission site.

Two weeks later I was asked to breakfast by a few elder members and the senior pastor. They didn't waste much time before they were drilling me about the mission trip and chastising me for making all the decisions without any authority. I tried to defend myself, telling them the senior pastor had told me to "go for it," but he claimed he had heard nothing about it. I was shocked and hurt, and for the first time realized the hard truth: My senior pastor and I were disconnected. Six months later I had resigned.

Looking back, I see many of the real problems that were hidden from me then: My senior pastor and I had not spent any real time getting to know each other on a personal or ministry level, we didn't understand each other's values, and we certainly were not on the same mission. Many of these things led to my resignation.

This disconnect saddens me, yet it is all too common. Many youth pastors end up leaving ministry because of unmet expectations regarding the relationship with their senior pastors. Is this the senior pastors' fault? Of course not, but they do need help in realizing the important role they play in keeping their youth pastors in ministry. Things don't go well in a youth ministry when the senior pastor and youth pastor are at odds, not talking, or holding judgments and grudges. The youth ministry, and the church as a whole, doesn't function at its best when the pastoral team is not unified. Trust, respect, and sacrifice don't happen when we aren't on the same page. The need is out there for senior pastors and youth pastors to be unified as they pursue a mission.




Our churches *can* function with a staff that's not unified. But they *cannot* reach the potential God has dreamed for them.


As I sat down to write this book, I'll admit my time as a youth pastor steered much of my thinking about the subject matter. After all, it is my experiences, good and bad, which have shaped how I've served other youth workers for many years. While my experiences have proved effective in the advice I gave to most youth workers, I realized it could not be the only source material I worked from to write this book. To that end, much of what you read has come from not only my time as a youth worker but also from others around me. Through interviews with youth pastors and senior pastors and through multiple surveys, I gathered the needed information to write this book. Many of their stories are retold in my own words throughout these pages.

A couple of things to know before you start...

**1. The comments in boxed text throughout the book mean something.**

I sent out the finished chapters to youth pastors and senior pastors all around the country to get their specific thoughts regarding the content of this book. As you read, you'll notice this icon  along with comments or even personal stories relating to the material from many senior pastors who were once youth pastors. Much of the boxed text lends validity to my points, while others offer some pushback. I chose to include all these comments because the pages should display my heart behind this book. There are many opinions out there which deserve to be heard. No single piece of writing or individual conversation will solve all the problems you have in ministry. My hope and prayer is for you to find nuggets of truth contained in my writing or in the boxed text and apply them. If this book brings fruit to the relationship between you and your senior pastor, I have achieved my goal.





**2. It takes two to tango.** For every chapter written to youth pastors, there's a chapter on the same topic written to senior pastors. I tried to help youth pastors take steps to understand their senior pastors' point of view and I did the same thing for senior pastors. Ideally, you will benefit the most from this book if both you and the senior pastor read it at the same time. Each exercise at the end of the chapter will be more helpful if you can debrief it together, but still beneficial if that's not possible.

**3. You don't have to be at your wits' end to read this.** I wrote this book because so many youth pastors came to me exasperated and ready to quit. If your relationship with your senior pastor is good, there is a lot of stuff in here that can help move it from good to great—from tweaking your communication style to gaining a common language and understanding of each other's core values. This is about developing unity in the church leadership so that the effects trickle down and build a healthy culture in your entire church.

**4. To all the women out there.** This book is written using masculine pronouns in reference to the senior pastor and youth pastor. This was done just for the sake of readability. When I tried to write out things like “he or she” and “him or her” in every instance, the book became wordy and difficult to read. There are an equal number of women in leadership who are doing phenomenal jobs, and I fully intend to honor that. I wrote in this language solely for readability.





chapter 1

{ youth pastor }

# **What I Heard You Say Was...**

**Using communication that counts**

There is so much that goes into having an effective, impactful youth ministry: discipling students, creating and running programs, managing a budget, leading and training adult volunteers, teaching transformationally, and last but not least, working with church staff. Bible college, internships, and seminary could never fully prepare anyone to handle your job. It requires you to wear many hats and communicate effectively in many situations. Not just the communication of your Wednesday night teaching or the counseling of a student, but also the small interactions in the office, the moments you're approached by parents or elders, the moments you're casting the vision to your volunteer staff, and especially the moments you're accountable to your senior pastor. Effective communication is a daily requirement for your job.

The easiest thing to do when we are busy or stressed (which seems to happen often in youth ministry) is to put our head down and just barrel through the work in front of us. We tend to communicate less frequently and effectively in stressful times. Most problems we face can be traced back to a breakdown in communication. Something was misunderstood, someone wasn't listening, or expectations weren't clear. The repercussions for these breakdowns can be huge.

Communication is the ingredient that will make or break your relationship with your senior pastor, your church and your ministry. Effective and clear communication can solve many problems before they even arise, and it has the ability to take your ministry and life forward in positive directions you never thought were possible.

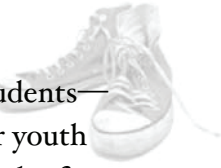


So many of the problems with communication lie in the fact that we just aren't honest with each other. For example, I do something as a youth pastor that makes the senior pastor go nuts, but instead of telling me, he goes and talks behind my back with a bunch of elders or other parents, and we never have an honest conversation about what frustrated him. Then I hear about it from some elder that is sent to "correct" me or "pacify" the senior pastor so that he can feel like I'm "handled."

## Quality Over Quantity: Making It Intentional

Mark, the local youth pastor, worked hard at regularly communicating with his volunteers. They had calendars, expectations, and job descriptions. They even met once a month after church to talk about the next month and upcoming events. This





surfaced great chaperones and helpers but didn't cultivate mentors of students—the greatest need of the ministry. Finally, after some advice from another youth pastor in town, Mark canceled the Sunday logistics meetings and turned the first 15 minutes of youth group every week into dodge-ball time. After the students showed up and had kicked off a game of dodge-ball, all the staff would go out in the hall to meet with Mark. Instead of sharing logistics and calendars with them, he would cast the vision of the youth ministry and the desire to see students transformed. He would then offer them one bit of advice or training to take and use as they built relationships with students that night, and then would send them off to do the transforming work.

This radically changed Mark's ministry. He had wanted mentors for the longest time but wasn't seeing any results. Yet after these small training sessions began, Mark noticed his adults begin to develop deeper relationships with students. He was also able to specifically challenge adults in these areas because his small trainings were addressing those issues. He was actually communicating less and having to prepare for less. But his communication was powerful and effective. It was intentional.

Speaking a lot of words, using body language, and listening aren't always enough. We can communicate until we are blue in the face, but unless it's intentional communication, it doesn't do much.

So much of our communication turns into bullet points or lists, getting lost in the white noise of church. This is especially true when we try to communicate to our senior pastors and others where our accountability is a factor. Our interactions with our senior pastors can often look like a student who's just returned from a life-changing mission trip. His parents ask him how the trip was and the student doesn't know what to say. He ends up going with "Great, Mom," or he fills in the silence with something both parties can understand: "The food was terrible" or "It rained every day while we were working" or even just "I loved working with the kids." When your senior pastor asks you how it's going, what do you say? Does your answer give him a clear view of the state of the youth ministry, or is it lost in the latest obstacle, funny story, or office detail? How intentional and focused is your communication with your senior pastor?

If you feel like your senior pastor doesn't understand what you're doing with the youth ministry or how students are growing, then try mixing up your traditional communication patterns with some of the following advice from other youth pastors. If your senior pastor doesn't buy in, he's less likely to support you when issues arise, help to provide extra resources, or provide you with the flexibility you desire.



You know one of the biggest problems is the lack of time the senior pastor and youth pastor spend together. Senior pastors make all kinds of time to check youth pastors out when hiring them, but they make no time to sit with them and just see how they are doing. Communication works way better within a relationship. Giving or receiving communication from someone you don't know or who doesn't know you seems inauthentic.

## Have 30-Second, 3-Minute, and 30-Minute Responses

Whether you have formal meetings or casual drop-ins, be ready for your senior pastor when he comes. Updating your senior pastor on the state of the youth ministry can be reduced to three responses: 30 seconds, 3 minutes, or 30 minutes. You should always be able to update your senior pastor based on these three response times. The key to developing these responses is knowing the ingredients, or formula, for each one. For a 30-second response, the formula looks like this:

**big picture + the “why” + student growth = 30-second response**

If you pass each other in the hall and he asks how it's going, have a 30-second response ready—“We are in the middle of our series on character, and the small group leaders are saying that students are starting to make some changes and growth steps in their integrity.” You don't have much time, but you should be able to tell him the main theme in your ministry while also communicating the “why” behind it and the impact it is having on your students.

If your pastor has time, he might ask a few more questions about the ministry, offering a chance for your 3-minute response. For a 3-minute response, the formula looks like this:

**big picture + the “why” + student growth + student story = 3-minute response**

Having a 3-minute conversation gives you the opportunity to tell your senior pastor the big picture, communicate the “why,” talk about your student growth, and also take it a step further by communicating a student story about what God is doing in or through them. This story adds a personal element to your overview conversation, and it lets the senior pastor know you are connecting with your students.



Every once in a while, you are given the opportunity to provide a 30-minute update on the youth ministry. This may come in a staff meeting or a one-on-one with the senior pastor. For a 30-minute response, the formula looks like this:

**mission + short-term goals + strategic plan + impact + needs = 30-minute response**

The key to the 30-minute response is your youth ministry's mission. Share with him in detail how every ministry within the youth group is doing on the mission. If you have small groups, go into detail about what is happening in the groups. Communicate your short-term goals within each ministry and how you are equipping your adult staff to work with students. You should also lay out your long-term strategic plan and the impact you hope the youth group will have in students' lives. This 30-minute update also offers the perfect opportunity to communicate your needs. Be very clear and realistic when you present your desires and how the church could help. Again, the main key of this conversation is communicating the youth ministry's mission. Make sure everything you say relates back to the mission so your senior pastor knows the "why" behind all you do. By having this 30-minute conversation already prepared, it also keeps you accountable to following through on your mission.

These three conversations may seem like a lot to prepare, but these small interactions hold huge power. Having these responses ready for your senior pastor builds his confidence in you and the youth ministry. It also arms the senior pastor for complaints or questions from other church members about the youth ministry. From these conversations, he knows that you have a strategic plan, effective small groups, capable staff, and positive outcomes. Arm your senior pastor any chance you can get. It will only grow the support for you and your ministry.


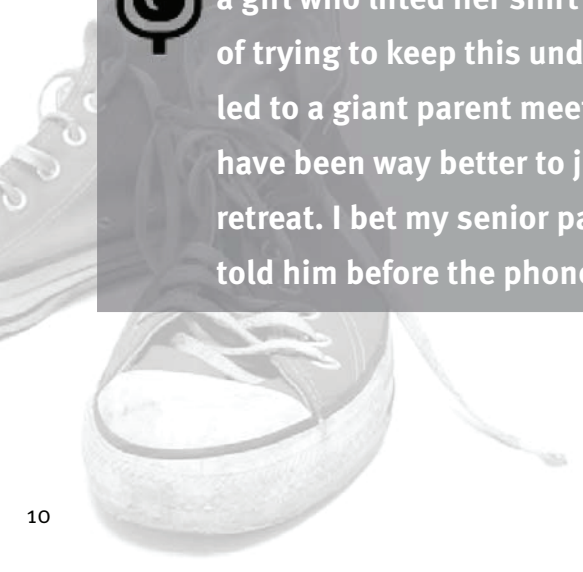


Isn't this messed up! You have to have these little presentations ready in your mind because the relationships are so rushed and disconnected that you don't just talk together regularly. Maybe I live in an ideal world, but even busy staff people should be getting together to build relationships and get on the same page. I wonder if Jesus' disciples had to have a 30-second update ready for their leader? Do we always have to give in to the culture, or can we shape a new kind of church culture where people actually have time for each other?

## Be the First to Deliver Bad News!

There are only a few things worse to a senior pastor than hearing bad news about the youth ministry from someone other than you. When this happens, his first reaction is likely to be that of distrust, or wondering why you were hiding what happened. It's hard to deliver bad news. And youth ministry lends itself to some bad news. Combine immature students with sugar and hormones, a handful of hovering parents, wacky games, and college-aged volunteers, and we all know you're going to have some bad news. You'll also have some life-changing kingdom moments. But they are probably coupled with some things like a hospital visit, broken relationships, or a run-in with a parent.

The best thing you can do when bad news comes is to be the first one in the senior pastor's office. When students make a bad decision and sneak out in the middle of the night on a retreat, just bring it up. If a parent overreacts and storms into the church office, it will go a lot better if the senior pastor is educated on the matter—not just better for you, but better for the church. The parent will know the church leaders are working together and are on the same page. They will also know there isn't much room for gossip or exaggeration. Even in the hardest moments, be the first one into your senior pastor's office. Your senior pastor truly desires open and honest communication about these things, so be forthcoming. It will take courage, but it will demonstrate your maturity and trustworthiness as a leader in the church.



I once ran a retreat in my first year as a youth pastor. I allowed some of my student leaders to pick out the movie for the weekend with some tight parameters. They brought me a movie called *Up the Creek*. It had no rating on the box, and they assured me it was this great comedy about a race down a river. In the first minute of the movie, the race was started by a girl who lifted her shirt and yelled, “Go!” I made the mistake of trying to keep this under wraps—that backfired big time and led to a giant parent meeting and a ton of questions. It would have been way better to just fess up when we got back from the retreat. I bet my senior pastor might have even laughed had I told him before the phone calls started from the parents.



## Don't Report; Communicate



There is a difference between reporting and communicating. Reporting can be done through e-mails or newsletters and is usually full of facts and numbers. Communicating is getting down to the heart of the matter and offering the “why” behind your program. We often don’t get beyond reporting when we meet with our senior pastor because he doesn’t already have the information we’re reporting on. So there’s a simple solution to this problem: Leave a paper trail of your ministry logistics, even if you weren’t asked for one.

Leave calendar, phone, and address information for all retreats and outings, along with event budgets and your overall strategic plan. Chances are that you have these details somewhere in your e-mail or computer. Make a copy and stick it into your senior pastor’s mailbox or regularly e-mail him. Do this for two reasons: so that every meeting with your senior pastor doesn’t turn into a time of transactional logistics, and so that your senior pastor will give you ministry freedom and the ability to take risks. Leaving a paper trail can turn your meetings into a time of powerful and necessary communication. You were both placed by God at your church; take advantage of it. *You have the ability to hold each other up, pray for each other and the church, and learn from each other when you meet.* Don’t report; communicate. When you move your meetings from reporting into communication, you’ll see your relationship begin to change.

## Silence = Negative Assumptions

When communication is lacking, a lot of room is left for insecurities and doubts to creep in. People tend to assume the worst in the midst of silence. Your senior pastor may become unsure of the state of the ministry, wondering how invested you are or if something is wrong. When you don’t regularly check in or interact with your senior pastor, he will most likely begin to assume there’s a problem. The funny thing is we often don’t check in when the ministry is doing really well because we don’t need as much help. But that can actually hurt the situation more than help it. When things are great, check in with your senior pastor, and things likely will stay great longer!

Effective communication between you and your senior pastor is key to making your relationship work to the benefit of you, your ministry, and the whole church. When the two of you are in sync, there is not much that can tear you down. But it takes effort and hard work on your part to get to that point. Make it important, and your relationship will likely flourish.

The following activity is for you to assess the quality of your communication and see how intentional it is. There is a similar assessment for senior pastors in the first chapter of the senior pastor section of this book. Take the assessment on your own, and begin to make some small changes that will begin to transform the communication between you and your senior pastor.





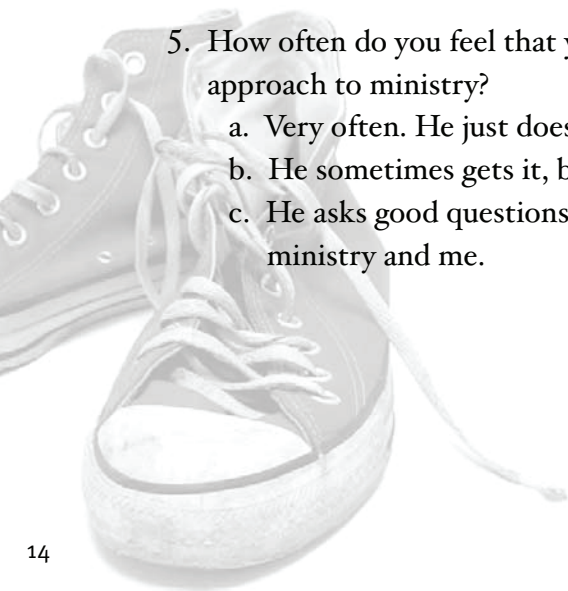
# **Intentional Communication**

## **Assessment**

The following is an assessment to help determine how intentional your communication is with your senior pastor. While this assessment can be helpful, ultimately, you know best how you are communicating well and how you need to improve in the communication that you share.

*If you are going through this book with your senior pastor, take 30 minutes this week to go through this activity on your own, and then meet with your senior pastor to discuss your thoughts. This assessment coincides with the senior pastor section of the book.*

1. Are your meetings (aside from entire church staff meetings) spontaneous or planned?
  - a. Always spontaneous
  - b. Half and half
  - c. Usually planned
2. What is your attitude going into a meeting with your senior pastor?
  - a. I avoid it.
  - b. I tolerate it.
  - c. I have a positive attitude about it.
3. How well does your senior pastor know your ministry?
  - a. He knows the ministry numbers.
  - b. He knows the basic schedule of events.
  - c. He knows the “why” behind the ministry and its greatest needs.
4. How well do you understand the pressures your senior pastor is facing?
  - a. I think I know what they are, but I’m not certain.
  - b. I am aware of the pressures he’s facing.
  - c. I offer support and pray for him as he faces these pressures.
5. How often do you feel that your senior pastor just doesn’t get your approach to ministry?
  - a. Very often. He just doesn’t understand me or youth ministry.
  - b. He sometimes gets it, but has too many other concerns.
  - c. He asks good questions and tries hard to understand the youth ministry and me.





6. How well have you communicated the purpose behind your youth ministry programming?
  - a. I give a report on what activities we are doing every year.
  - b. I've laid out the youth ministry plan and a reason for each part of it.
  - c. I regularly meet and share about why we are doing each of our programs, their impact and challenges.
7. How well do you know your senior pastor?
  - a. I know a little about him and his approach to ministry.
  - b. I know him on a personal level, and I'm beginning to understand what motivates him.
  - c. I know him well, and his heart and dreams for ministry.
8. How much evaluation have you received from your senior pastor?
  - a. We evaluate once a year, and when issues arise.
  - b. We evaluate a few times a year, especially after an event.
  - c. We regularly discuss my overall performance.
9. Do you know what "a job well done" looks like to your senior pastor?
  - a. I am not sure what he considers "a job well done."
  - b. I have an idea, but I had to learn it the hard way—through trial and error.
  - c. I know what my senior pastor expects from me and what he considers a good job.
10. When my senior pastor and I meet, we communicate about
  - a. Problems and concerns mostly.
  - b. Logistics/calendar and problems.
  - c. Our ministries' progress and needs, and personal life issues.

Add up your scores below.

A\_\_\_\_\_ B\_\_\_\_\_ C\_\_\_\_\_

Based on your scores, take a look at what category your communication fits into, and come up with an action plan that you can initiate this week to help make your communication more intentional.



# A's = 2 or more and C's = 2 or less

If you had more than 2 A's and less than 2 C's, your communication with your senior pastor is not very intentional. It's probably lacking in both quality and quantity and could have some potential bitterness and judgments mixed up with it. This type of communication tends to lead toward negative assumptions by both parties and a natural division. Although you may be able to function together, you are not reaching the full potential of what a unified team in ministry can reach. Consider taking the following steps: First, begin praying specifically for your senior pastor daily. This can often change some of our own attitudes and understanding of someone. Second, ask for a time when you and your senior pastor can meet, and you can show him your strategic plan for the youth ministry, and the "why" behind each part of it (make sure to include your heart behind it). This will take time, and possibly several attempts, but it could open the door to a new type of communication and a new platform for your relationship.

Action Step:

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# A's = 1 or more and C's = 3 or less

If you had 1 or more A's and less than 4 C's, your communication with your senior pastor is somewhat regular but not as intentional as it could be. You have a foundation built on communication, but interactions are more transactional than they are intentional. Your communication has some necessary logistic and calendar focus but lacks in overall purpose and the "why" behind what you're doing or planning. Take some time to think through some 3-minute responses from the chapter, and use casual interactions to begin to share ministry wins and ministry needs. Turn "water-cooler conversations" into intentional sharing and listening that will grow your senior pastor's respect and trust in you.

Warning: Check your heart! Are you playing church office politics, or do you really care about your senior pastor?

Action Step:



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**A's = 0 and C's = 4 or more**

If you had no A's and more than 4 C's, your communication has a strong foundation and is pretty intentional. Continue the road you are on, and grow your relationship by going out of the way to serve and support your senior pastor. Move into the level of "soul care." Offer a good mix of respect and encouragement. This will most likely lead to reciprocation and an even stronger, healthier relationship. Consider hanging out with your senior pastor in a social setting, such as at a ball game, or even asking your senior pastor to mentor you in ministry.

Action Step:

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**THIS IS A SAMPLE**

**The number of pages is limited.**

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