



ROBERT WALTERS

# FIVE LESSONS IN TACKLING THE TECH TALENT SHORTAGE

# CONTENTS

The shortage of tech talent in South East Asia	3
<b>Lesson #1:</b> Going the extra mile	4
<b>Lesson #2:</b> Bringing the meaning back to benefits	8
<b>Lesson #3:</b> The whole is greater than the sum of its parts	12
<b>Lesson #4:</b> 360° learning	16
<b>Lesson #5:</b> From the top	22
Relooking the five lessons	26
Methodology	28

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## ABOUT ROBERT WALTERS



“FOR OVER 30 YEARS, BUSINESSES ACROSS THE GLOBE HAVE RELIED ON US TO FIND THE VERY BEST SPECIALIST PROFESSIONALS.”

Robert Walters, Chief Executive Officer

Our story begins in 1985 when the Group opened its first office in central London. Since then, we have developed into a global specialist professional recruitment group, operating in a diverse range of markets worldwide.

For over 30 years, businesses across the globe have relied on us to find the very best specialist professionals, talented executives have trusted us to help build their careers, and companies have outsourced their recruitment processes to us. It's a success story we're proud of and one that's built on the strength and passion of our people.

As the business continues to expand, we operate with the same commitment to service and quality. Every candidate is treated as an individual with a focus on advising and consulting. It means we continually have the best candidates on the market to offer you.

Although our reach is global, we remain committed to hiring local talent so our people have a deep understanding of the local market and culture. It's what makes us unique and helps us remain a trusted recruitment partner of the world's leading firms.

## THE SHORTAGE OF TECH TALENT IN SOUTH EAST ASIA

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Difficulty in hiring talent on a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being the most difficult), as rated by tech hiring managers across the region

68%

of hiring managers said it took three months or more to fill an open tech position on their team

70%

of hiring managers said the shortage of tech talent has negatively affected their speed of product development

In the last decade, technology has developed at a breakneck speed in South East Asia. In 2017 alone, funding for South East Asian late-stage startups captured US\$7.86 billion (S\$10.8 billion) from investors.<sup>1</sup> By early 2019, there were two decacorns and five other unicorns in South East Asia.<sup>2</sup>

The rise of these startups has pushed larger organisations to accelerate their digital efforts as well, leading to a high demand for tech talent across all industries and sectors. However, the development of skill sets hasn't quite kept pace, resulting in a tech talent shortage. Companies are finding it increasingly challenging to ensure that they have the tech talent they need to accelerate their business in this digital world.

How can companies attract and retain the tech talent they need in this competitive environment?

We spoke with forward-thinking business leaders, HR experts, hiring managers and tech professionals across South East Asia, and put together the insights we gained to help answer this question with five lessons in tackling the tech talent shortage.

<sup>1</sup>South East Asia sees record startup funding in 2017, <https://www.techinasia.com/southeast-asia-sees-record-startup-funding-2017>

<sup>2</sup>After Grab, Here's the Second Decacorn in Southeast Asia, <https://seasia.co/2019/04/05/after-grab-here-s-the-second-decacorn-in-southeast-asia>

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## GOING THE EXTRA MILE



In this talent short landscape, companies need to think beyond the traditional recruitment process to stay ahead of their competition.

To secure the best tech talent, companies need to start earlier, look wider, and engage more deeply.

“ **APPROACH YOUR RECRUITMENT LIKE A STRATEGIC, TARGETED MARKETING CAMPAIGN.** ”

- Country Head, AI-based startup, Vietnam

# GOING THE EXTRA MILE

## Growing awareness

With such strong competition for tech talent, employers can no longer afford to hire only when roles open up. The candidate short market means that finding a suitable candidate may take up to several months, which would lower the team's morale and productivity.

Companies need to be more proactive, rather than reactive to their hiring needs. One way to do this is to build their employer brand, strengthening awareness among tech jobseekers.

This will not only ensure a ready pipeline of quality candidates when there are open positions, it will also help keep potential candidates more motivated throughout the entire recruitment process.

“Being one of the unicorns in Indonesia means that many people are aware of us, but we know that having strong brand recognition isn't the same as having a good employer brand. To continue driving our business ahead, we need the very best tech talent and we will need to put in our very best efforts to attract this group of people. We make use of a mix of digital and traditional methods to market our employer brand to people – we have a careers website, we use social media, we go to events and university job fairs, organise our own recruitment roadshows and more. Through these efforts, we have seen our pipeline of tech talent grow steadily.”

**- Lita Rosalia,  
Recruitment, Tokopedia**

## Widening the search

Reaching out to untapped pools of talent can also help you overcome the shortage of skilled professionals.

In addition to the more traditional methods of sourcing such as job boards, job fairs, LinkedIn, and recruitment consultancies, companies should consider expanding their search for talent overseas. This is particularly relevant in South East Asia, where tech professionals are relatively open to moving within the region.

Another way is to look for tech talent in other industries. For example, instead of seeking someone with a financial services background, financial institutions can consider talent from commerce industries to widen their options.

“At Tencent, we have launched various programmes to address the skills gap. In Thailand, we offer comprehensive management and professional development pathways, and work closely with industry bodies and other organisations to attract and retain talent by offering opportunities to grow both vertically and horizontally. As a case in point, many of our executives in Thailand studied and worked in engineering but are now in different functions, such as tech. These, combined with our dynamic culture and open communication, have had a notably positive impact on our recruitment and retention efforts. Tencent Thailand now ranks as one of the top five workplaces of choice among the tech companies in the country.”

**- Wareerat Toni Kitchaixankul, Associate Director,  
Talent Acquisition, Tencent Thailand**

## Making the experience a pleasant one

Searching, applying, and interviewing for a job is a stressful journey filled with uncertainties and jobseekers would value a process that is as short as possible.

As an employer, being the first company to make a job offer is a competitive advantage. Jobseekers will feel valued and appreciated, and will compare every other offer against the first. This is why companies are making every effort to shorten their hiring process.

Companies with longer processes can try to make up for this by investing additional effort in keeping their candidates interested and engaged. This includes laying out a clear timeline and having calls with potential hires to assure them of the company's interest.

“Good tech professionals aren't available for long. To secure good people, we have to work faster than others. I relooked at our recruitment process and saw that our coding test could be improved on. We previously had to issue the test, wait for candidates to respond, before getting it vetted. When this was done across multiple candidates, it became quite inefficient. We decided to implement a Saturday assessment centre, inviting potential candidates to all take the coding test at the same time, before the tests were sent in bulk to the hiring managers for vetting. Streamlining just this part of our recruitment alone has sped up our process significantly.”

**- Omesh Mahtani,  
Talent Acquisition Manager, HelloGold**

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## BRINGING THE MEANING BACK TO BENEFITS

Giving talented employees the salary they deserve is important. However, for companies with budget constraints, what can they do with their compensation and benefits packages to attract and retain employees?

The answer? It all depends on the employee.

“ IT'S ABOUT BEING CREATIVE SO YOU CAN PROVIDE BENEFITS THAT MAKE SENSE FOR THE EMPLOYEE. ”

- Carolyn Chin-Parry, digital leader and transformation expert

# BRINGING THE MEANING BACK TO BENEFITS

## One size cannot fit all

Medical and life insurance, flexible working, wellness programmes – the list of benefits that companies are offering are increasingly getting longer as they seek to attract and retain top talent.

However, most employees only use a small part of the long list of benefits they are offered. This is not only ineffective in terms of cost, it also doesn't help fulfil the objective of attracting and retaining talent.

Instead of a one-size-fits-all approach, companies need to look for creative ways to incorporate more flexibility into their benefits package. By allowing employees to maximise the value of their benefits, companies can show employees that they truly care for and value every single individual, which will go a long way towards improving retention rates.

“Our team is generally very young. Even so, we understand that every single one of our employees has different needs. A married team member with children will probably value insurance more importantly than another team member who's single. One way we've incorporated more flexibility into our benefits is to combine annual and sick leave days so employees get to maximise the usage of their leave days. These are days they are entitled to and they work hard – they deserve to be able to use their leave days flexibly. Also, traffic in Manila can be quite bad so we allow our employees to work from home when they need to. These initiatives have proved popular among our teams, raising their overall motivation.”

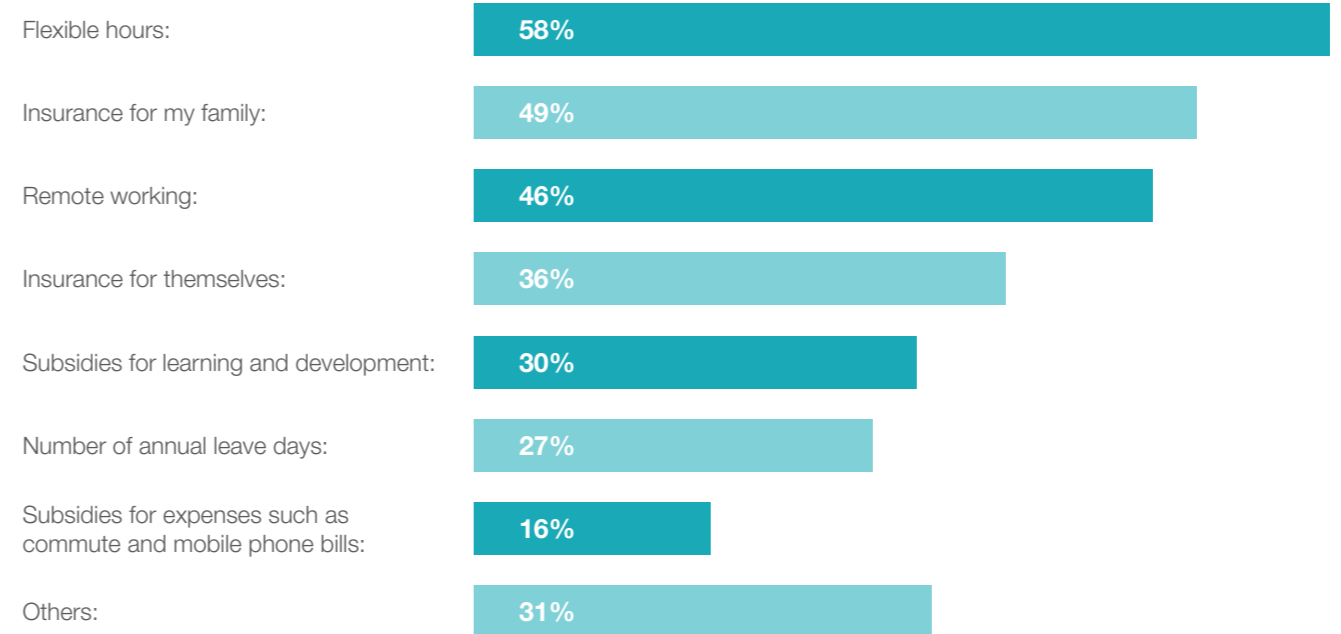
**- Delphine Tollas Vermot,  
Head of Product and Development, Moneymax.ph – part of CAG group.**

# 57%

of tech professionals would agree to a smaller increment if offered the right benefits

## Benefits tech professionals consider when choosing a company:

(respondents were allowed to choose up to three)



While flexible hours was the most popular benefit, tech professionals surveyed had a wide range of preferences, which is why we recommend benefits be tailored to their needs.

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## THE WHOLE IS GREATER THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS

Finding the exact fit for a role is often a challenge in this talent short landscape.

Instead of leaving a role open for months and risk lowering productivity and morale, employers should remember that their employees work in teams and they can compensate for each other's strengths and weaknesses.

“ **YOU DON'T FORCE FIT PEOPLE INTO A BOX – YOU FIT THE BOX  
AROUND YOUR PEOPLE.** ”

- Ong Whee Teck, CEO, Trusted Services and Deep Identity



# THE WHOLE IS GREATER THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS

## Thinking about your team as a whole

Every search should begin with a clear image of how the ideal candidate should look like – but what happens when the ideal candidate doesn't exist in the market?

There are companies who choose to wait until the 'right' person shows up, but the time this takes may create unnecessary strain for the rest of your team members.

If there are candidates who show high potential, then businesses should consider them for the role – even if they may not have the exact experience or skill set. The time spent searching for someone else could be put towards training them and this would be beneficial to your team's learning as well.

## Identifying high potential candidates:

1. Does the candidate show good aptitude for learning quickly and working in teams?
2. Is the candidate comfortable using technology to create solutions for the business?
3. Does the candidate have other experiences or skills that could be useful to the team, even if they are not necessarily relevant to their role?
4. Are there other team members who can pair up with the candidate to compensate for any weaknesses and help train them?

## Growing a person into a role

Even the very best of talent will require training and support to shine in a new role.

Some organisations make the mistake of hiring talented individuals with stellar past experiences, expecting them to deliver the same spectacular results within their company. However, the environments, teams, and business needs are different, and adapting to these will require time and effort from both the new employee as well as the team itself.

This is even more crucial when hiring someone with high growth potential. To ensure that they achieve their fullest potential, hiring managers need to invest time and effort in ensuring they grow into the role. An employee who feels unsupported is likely to get demotivated quickly and may end up deciding that the role wasn't a good fit for them.

"We sit with Tencent Thailand employees from their first day onwards to work with them on their career paths. The focus is on how both Tencent Thailand and our employees can grow together. Based on the outcome of these conversations, we then formulate and execute work-based development plans to enable people to grow personally and professionally in line with their aspirations. We aim to help our team build personal and professional skill sets, while still being able to explore their own special interests. If we do this successfully, it's not only beneficial for our employees but also for the company – a win-win situation."

**- Wareerat Toni Kitchaixankul,  
Associate Director, Talent Acquisition, Tencent Thailand**

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## 360° LEARNING

With tech evolving so rapidly every day, it's no wonder tech talent rank learning and development opportunities as one of the most important considerations when choosing a company.

In addition to sending employees for training that will upskill them technically, companies should also be looking to inject learning and development opportunities into employees' everyday work and life.

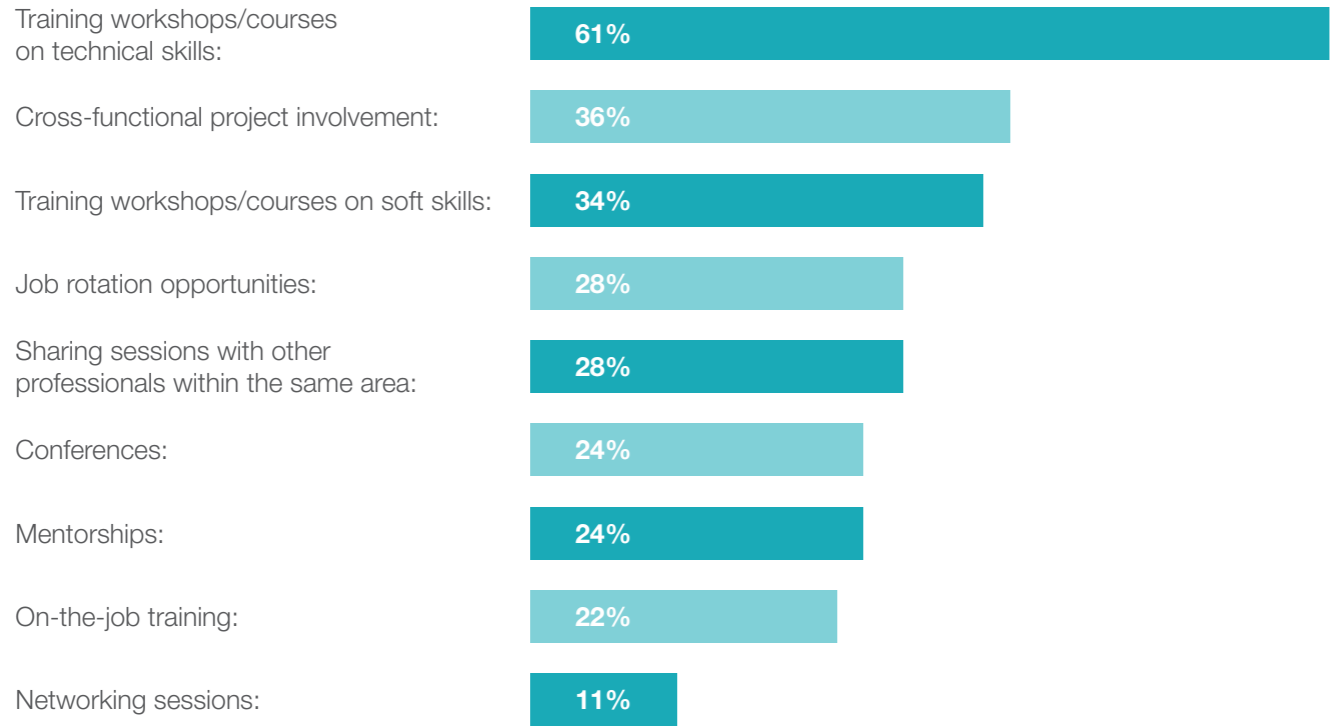
“ **SOMEONE WHO IS WILLING TO LEARN WILL ALWAYS FIND A SOLUTION EVEN WITHOUT THE 'RIGHT' SKILL SETS.** ”

- Aaron Tan, Head of Data and Analytics, SGX

# 360° LEARNING

## Training opportunities tech professionals are most interested in:

(respondents were allowed to choose up to three)



## Learning by collaborating

Working with other teams can be a good way for tech talent to learn about the different areas of tech and pick up skills that they may not be as familiar with.

Cross-functional job rotations may be one way to achieve this. This could be a permanent shift to a different team, or a short-term exchange where members of different teams swap roles to learn about each other's work. Disruption to the business can be minimised by planning in advance and doing this in a structured manner.

Another way of increasing learning across teams is to have project teams that involve employees from different teams. This will allow them to interact, communicate, and learn from each other. Interaction with colleagues from other teams will also improve workplace relationships and aid in retention.

"We actively encourage our employees to consider moving across teams if they are looking for something new in their work, and this really helps us retain our good people. Instead of seeking a new job when they find that they want a new challenge, our employees will look at our internal jobs board first to see if there are any roles available for them to move to. Another way we provide inter-team learning is by having projects that involve members from different teams and functions. This not only allows them to learn from other teams, it also helps them build stronger workplace relationships outside of their team."

- Lita Rosalia,  
Recruitment, Tokopedia

# 360° LEARNING

## Learning by sharing

Sending your talent for speaking events can be a good way to improve their communication and presentation skills.

This not only shows your employees that you recognise and appreciate their hard work, your brand will also benefit from the additional exposure.

To make the most out of such opportunities, ensure that the topic is relevant to something your employees are passionate about and interested in. Give them the support they need by providing time and resources to help them plan and prepare for the event as well.

“We regularly send our employees out to events as speakers. Although it may not necessarily be a more traditional type of learning, such as a workshop or a training course, we actually find it quite effective. For one, our employees appreciate such opportunities as it’s a form of recognition. They get to speak on topics they are passionate about and exchange views with others as well. In the process, they not only improve their networking and communication skills, they also get to boost their confidence – these are all essential soft skills at work. Additionally, it’s good branding for both the employee and the company, so it’s very much win-win all around.”

**- Cindy Sutjadi,  
Talent Acquisition Manager, OVO**

## Learning by teaching

Mentorships offer great opportunities for employees to learn and grow. For mentees, this is often an easier and faster way to pick up knowledge and skills relevant to their work and company.

For mentors, this is also beneficial as they get to review their own work while refining their communication and leadership skills. Many mentors have also benefitted from reverse mentorship, with mentees bringing new ideas, perspectives, and ways of doing things to the table.

Mentorships do not have to be restricted to within the organisation. Companies will find that by encouraging their employees to mentor external parties, they may benefit by learning more about different environments and gaining a fresh perspective on things.

“Learning never stops – whether you’re in a junior role or a senior role. I always encourage our more senior members of the team to go out and mentor growing startups because I think the ones who really benefit are us. Although we’re investing time and effort to help train them in terms of technology and other skills, we’re also getting reverse mentored in the process. We get to see how startups work, collaborate, and innovate. We’re getting fresh ideas and perspectives to inspire our own creativity. At the same time, we’re also getting to know the next generation better, and that helps us become better leaders too.”

**- Ong Whee Teck,  
CEO, Trusted Services and Deep Identity**

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## FROM THE TOP

Consciously or otherwise, employees take cue and direction from the leaders of their company.

For both tech and non-tech organisations, the leaders first have to be people who embody the employer brand, think about their team members, are flexible and adaptable, and constantly learn and develop themselves. This enables organisations to attract, inspire and retain top tech talent.

“ **TOKOPEDIA IS BUILT AS A UNIVERSITY, NOT A KINGDOM, AND IT'S IMPORTANT FOR US TO BRING IN TALENT WHO CAN BE GREAT TEACHERS.** ”

- Lita Rosalia, Recruitment, Tokopedia

## FROM THE TOP

### Walking the talk

Too often, tech teams for companies outside of the tech industry are bogged down by support and maintenance issues. This leads to tech professionals becoming demotivated as they feel that they are not creating new value.

The leadership of a company determines its culture and direction. In this digital age, it is important that the leaders of companies, tech and non-tech alike, believe in the value of technology and how it can accelerate the business.

To enable this, companies need to set aside resources and time to allow their tech professionals to innovate and create value for the business – allowing them to truly step into the role of a business driver.

“There are organisations and boards out there that are highly focused on the Return of Investment (ROI) of their digitalisation efforts. However, the impact of digitalisation cannot be measured that way. Digital is inevitably going to be a big part of our world and companies that don't transform quickly enough are simply going to lose out. Instead of having your teams focus on proving the ROI of all your digital efforts and initiatives, organisations need to instead empower their teams to look at long-term future proofing so that they can innovate and do what makes sense for the business.”

- **Carolyn Chin-Parry,**  
digital leader and transformation expert

### Making value apparent

Hiring the right people to lead your tech team is also crucial. Technical abilities, such as the actual ability to develop a refined code, should be secondary when looking for a leader. Instead, this person needs to have a good understanding of the current technology landscape and a solid technical foundation alongside strong stakeholder management skills to help convince the business of the value of tech innovation.

At the same time, tech leaders also need to be able to communicate with their team members well and show them the value of seemingly meaningless or tedious tasks. While skilled tech professionals may want to contribute and innovate, this is only meaningful when done in line with the context of the business, and the tech leader has to be that bridge between his team and the stakeholders.

“Talented professionals don't just want to earn a paycheck. They want to know that their efforts and contributions are actually adding value to the business. As the head of my team, I try to do this in two ways. One is ensuring a good flow of communication so that they understand and see how their work fits into the bigger picture. I also bring them to meetings so they understand the context of their tasks and projects. The second thing I do is to name-drop. I explicitly name my team members when crediting them so that our colleagues in other teams know them – and when they meet, they get thanked in person and that helps them feel valued and like a part of the team.”

- **Aaron Tan,**  
Head of Data and Analytics, SGX

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## RELOOKING THE FIVE LESSONS



1

### **Go the extra mile**

in your recruitment process to improve your employer branding, reach out to a wider pool of candidates, and keep them engaged and motivated.

2

### **Bring the meaning back to benefits**

by ensuring that your compensation and benefits package is tailored to better meet your employees' needs.

3

### **The whole is greater than the sum of its parts**

so use your team to your advantage. Compensate for any weaknesses in a team member by pairing them up with another colleague.

4

### **Encourage 360° learning**

by providing growth opportunities such as mentorships, speaking events and cross-functional projects.

5

### **It begins from the top**

and your leadership team has to believe in tech for your tech talent to feel valued and appreciated.

# METHODOLOGY

## Thank you

We would like to thank the following companies for their help and contributions in making this e-guide possible.



We would also like to thank Carolyn Chin-Parry and the Vietnam country head of an AI-based startup for providing their personal insights, as well as the technology professionals who participated in our survey.

## Methodology

This e-guide was published in June 2019. The five learnings put forth within this publication are based on the insights gained from interviews with the nine individuals featured, as well as data from external research. We additionally conducted a survey with nearly 400 technology professionals and hiring managers across South East Asia.

# CONTACT US

To find out more about the current technology recruitment market, or to discuss your recruitment needs, please contact one of our specialist consultants today:



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