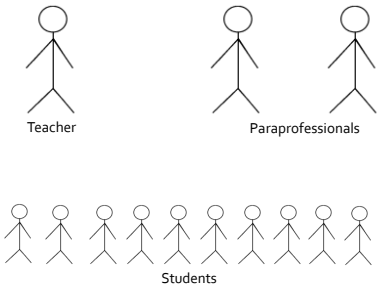
Patrick Mulick BCBA

From Managers to Leaders: Bringing Out the Best in Teacher-Paraeducator Teams

THE 2026 CASE CONFERENCE
PROVIDENCE • NOV 11-13

Handouts here!

1



2

What the Law Says

- Paraprofessionals are to be "appropriately trained and supervised, in accordance with State law, regulation, and written policy" –IDEA
- "A paraprofessional may not provide any instructional service to a student unless the paraprofessional is working under the direct supervision of a teacher consistent with this section." –ESSA
- Most states define a paraprofessional or "paraeducator" directly within their legal code as an employee who operates exclusively under the supervision of a certificated staff member. For example:
  - **Washington State (RCW 28A.413.010):** Explicitly defines a paraeducator as a public school employee who *"works under the supervision of a certificated or licensed staff member to support and assist in providing instructional and other services."*
  - **California, Texas, New York, etc.:** All have matching administrative codes detailing the required frequency of oversight, documentation of supervision, and boundaries of what a para can do without a teacher present.

3



"Though supervisory expectations typically fall on special education teachers, many teachers report feeling unequipped for these roles because they were not emphasized in teacher preparation programs and because they receive little administrative support." **— Biggs, E. E., Gilson, C. B., & Carter, E. W.** (2019).

4

The Reality

- We have teachers and paraprofessionals working in a field with a high burnout and turnover rate
- We have students with very different and complex needs
- We have paraprofessionals working with them who often have little to no training on how to do so
- We have teachers overseeing the paraprofessionals who have had little to no training on how to work with and lead adults
- We have administrators overseeing the teachers and paraprofessionals with very little time and resources to support positive teaming
- The teachers, paras, and kids, all with varying personalities and needs, are placed for a full day, five days a week, for 180 days

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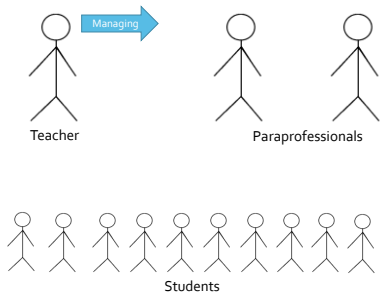
How Might You Use This Information?

- Putting on your own in house PD (full length or in nuggets)
- Teacher-paraeducator teaming website
- Creating your own special education manual
- Topics for newsletters
- Day to day coaching
- Reference points for staff feedback and evaluations

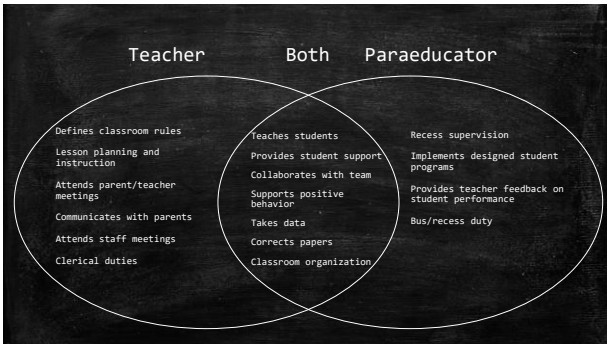
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Role Clarity

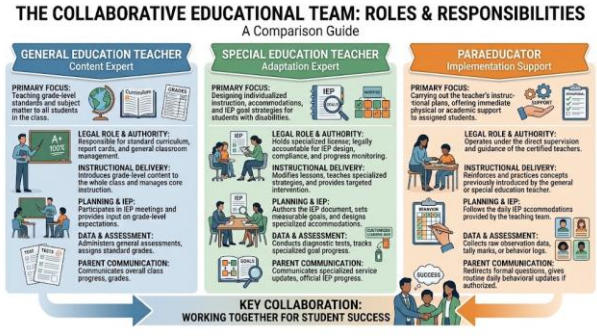
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8



9



10

Responsibility Domain	Special Education Teacher Role	Paraprofessional Role	Both
Lesson Planning & Accommodations	• Designs core lessons and curriculum.	• Reviews lesson plans in advance.	• Discusses what worked/didn't work during a lesson.
	• Determines accommodations/modifications based on IEPs.	• Prepares physical materials (visuals, adapted books).	• Brainstorms creative engagement ideas.
Direct Instruction	• Delivers whole-group or small group instruction.	• Supports individual students while whole group instruction occurs.	• Keeps students engaged and on-task during transitions.
	• Introduces new academic concepts and skills.	• Reteaches/reinforces concepts introduced by teacher.	• Leads 1:1 or small group instruction.
Behavioral Support	• Designs Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs).	• Creates behavior specific visuals under the guidance of the teacher.	• Implements behavior plan.
	• Trains staff on specific on targeted de-escalation strategies.	• Provides data and feedback on behavioral interventions.	• Debriefs after major behavioral incidents to update plans.

11

Responsibility Domain	Special Education Teacher Role	Paraprofessional Role	Both
IEP Data Collection	• Designs data collection sheets/tracking systems.	• Informs teaching on progress	•Actively records daily data (frequency, duration, tallies).
	• Analyzes data for IEP progress reports and goals.	• Shares thoughts on how to find greater success	•Reviews data sheets weekly.
Communication	• Handles all official communication with parents/guardians.	• Directs parent questions regarding progress/behavior to the teacher.	• Shares general updates about student performance or small wins with the team.
	• Collaborates with admin, therapists, and gen-ed teachers.	• Completes daily home-school communication logs *if* approved by teacher.	
Classroom Logistics	• Sets the daily schedule and staff rotation.	• Manages daily setup of sensory tools or station work.	• Keeps the classroom safe, organized, and accessible for all students.
	• Manages compliance paperwork and deadlines.	• Assists with student transitions, arrival, and dismissal.	

12

Rules of the Roles

- The teacher is the designer and implementor, the paraeducator is the implementor
- A teacher should never ask something of their staff that they themselves would not do
- Paraprofessionals should not be doing work that is specifically designed to be completed by a certificated teacher
- The paraeducator should not be the primary communicator between home and school

13

SPECIAL EDUCATION TEAM DAILY SCHEDULE

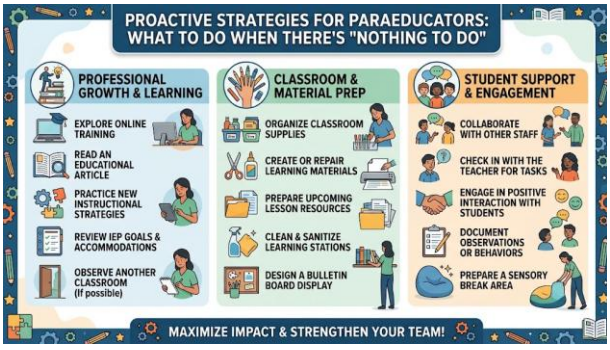
Instructional Support & Inclusion Matrix | School Year 2026–2027

Time	Special Ed Teacher	Paraeducator 1	Paraeducator 2
--	Teacher Name	Para 1 Name	Para 2 Name
7:45 AM - 8:15 AM	Morning Prep / IEP Review	Duty / Bus Arrival Support	Bus Arrival Support
8:15 AM - 8:45 AM	Homeroom / Morning Meeting	Group A Inclusion (Room 101)	1:1 Support - Student J.D.
8:45 AM - 9:30 AM	Direct Instruction: ELA (Small Group)	ELA Small Group Support	1:1 Support - Student J.D. (ELA)
9:30 AM - 10:15 AM	Direct Instruction: Math (Small Group)	Math Center Station 1	1:1 Support - Student J.D. (Math)
10:15 AM - 10:30 AM	Recess Supervision / Break	Recess Duty Support	1:1 Recess Supervision
10:30 AM - 11:15 AM	IEP Goal Work / Progress Monitoring	Resource Room Pull-Out	Life Skills Group
11:15 AM - 11:45 AM	Lunch Duty / Team Coordination	Para Lunch Break (Group A)	1:1 Lunch / Cafeteria Support
11:45 AM - 12:15 PM	Teacher Lunch Break	Gen Ed Inclusion Support	Para Lunch Break (Group B)
12:15 PM - 1:00 PM	Direct Instruction: Writing / Social Skills	Writing Accommodations Support	1:1 Behavior Plan Support

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Time	Special Ed Teacher	Paraeducator 1	Paraeducator 2	Paraeducator 3
--	Teacher Name	Para 1 Name	Para 2 Name	Para 3 Name
7:45 AM - 8:15 AM	Morning Prep / IEP Review Focus:Attendence, greeting kids Avoid: Being on the computer the whole time	Duty / Bus Arrival Support Focus: Greeting kids, check with bus driver Avoid: Carrying things for students	Duty / Bus Arrival Support Focus: Greeting kids, check with bus driver Avoid: Carrying things for students	Classroom Setup / Prep Focus: Set up work folders Avoid:Organizing things the kids can take care of
8:15 AM - 8:45 AM	Homeroom / Morning Meeting Focus: Kids focussing on teacher, not screens Avoid: Complaining	Group A Inclusion (Room 101) Focus: Connecting students to peers Avoid: Speaking over the teacher	1:1 Support - Student J.D. Focus: Use of communication device Avoid: Getting out supplies for him	Group B Inclusion (Room 104) Focus: Freeing up teacher to connect with kids Avoid: Sitting right next to kids

15



16

If You Permit It, You Promote It



17

Every moment of the school day is work.

18

Paraeducator Sub Plans

- Brief description of the students you support: Strengths, interests, needs (use initials, not student names)
- Triggers to avoid with students
- Who are the other adults in the room?
- Who to go to for support?
- Logistics with lunch/break/bathroom
- Other relevant information

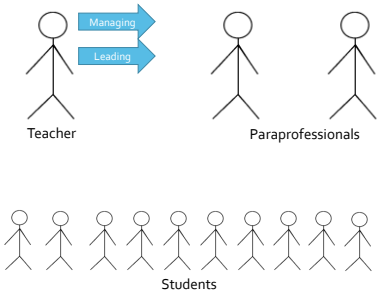
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Leaders in the Classroom

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22

A leader with no followers is not a leader, but a wanderer.



23

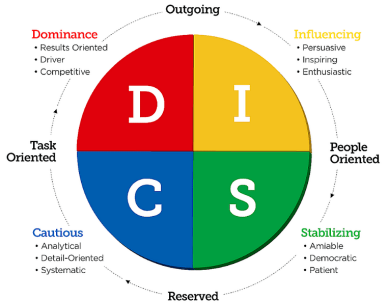
> Leadership is not about titles, positions or flowcharts. It is about one life influencing another.
>
> JOHN C. MAXWELL

24

"Inexperienced leaders are quick to lead before knowing anything about the people they intend to lead. But mature leaders listen, learn, and then lead."



25



26

Task Oriented and Outgoing (Dominance)

- Delegate outcomes, not just methods
  "My goal is for Justin to finish 10 math problems independently. I'll leave it to you how to chunk the time, just let me know how it goes."
- Celebrate how much they got done and how well they did handling situations with students
- May excel at:
  - Assessing students
  - Reviewing data with students
  - Managing classroom wide or individual reinforcement systems
  - Running small groups
  - Running fluency drills with students

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People Oriented and Outgoing (Influencing)

- Data collection and organization may be seen as tedious
  - Keep it simple
  - Visual checklists may be helpful
- Celebrate their student impact and creativity
  - *"The way you got Sarah to smile and participate today was amazing"*
- May excel at
  - Play-based interventions or role playing
  - Being the social match maker in gen ed
  - Leading morning meeting/calendar time
  - Managing recess and lunch
  - Managing a gamified learning center or behavior plan

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People Oriented and Reserved (Stabilizing)

- Give adequate warnings of changes in routine
- Celebrate privately about the impact they are having on students
- May excel at
  - Working with a student in need of a calm presence and/or patience
  - Supporting a student with a delicate medical routine
  - Supporting in gen ed and letting the teacher be the star of the show
  - Supporting from behind in circle/calendar time
  - Supporting a student in need of a calm, consistent approach
  - Working with students on daily living skills (sorting laundry, hand washing, meal prep, etc.)

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Task Oriented and Reserved (Cautious)

- Give detailed directions and the logic behind them
  - *Marcus needs to write three sentences. He can have verbal prompts, but please don't write the words for him. He is becoming very prompt dependent on others doing things for him and we want to avoid that."*
- Give private, objective praise
- May excel at
  - Managing behavioral data management
  - Managing independent work systems
  - Working with Assistive Technology or specialized equipment
  - Facilitating Direct Instruction groups
  - Providing specific accommodations in general education

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Organizing Classroom Materials

Dominance	Influencing	Stabilizing	Cautious
▪ Organizes them rapidly to get the job done quickly and move	▪ Organizes them creatively, making things colorful and visually exciting.	▪ Organizes them traditionally, keeping everything exactly where it has always been.	▪ Organizes them systematically, using precise labels, color-coding, and perfect alignment.

31

During Student Learning

DISC Style	Teaching Style	Potential Superpower	Potential Blind Spot
Dominance	Results Oriented and Direct	High Efficiency	Impatience with Processing
Influencing	Energetic and Gamified	Maximum Engagement	Over-Stimulation and Distraction
Stabilizing	Patient and Routine Driven	Endless Patience	Over-Assisting
Cautious	Systemic and Precise	High Fidelity and Accuracy	Perfectionism

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During a Student's Escalation

DISC Style	First Reaction	Potential Superpower	Potential Blind Spot
Dominance	Takes charge Immediately	Unshakeable Decisiveness	Power Struggle
Influencing	Defuse and Distract	High Relational Equity	Accidental Rewarding
Stabilizing	Absorb and Co-Regulate	Unmatched Calmness	Hesitation
Cautious	Assess the Protocol	Flawless Implementation	Rigidity

33

The Perfect "Crisis Team" Synergy

- If you have a classroom with multiple adults, you can see how pairing them up during an escalation is an art form
  - **The S and the D:** The **S-style** adult handles the direct interaction with the student because their calm energy lowers the escalation. The **D-style** adult steps back to manage the rest of the classroom, clearing out peer audiences and managing logistics.
  - **The C and the I:** The **I-style** adult uses their relational warmth to re-engage the student once they start to de-escalate, while the **C-style** adult looks at the clock, tracks the duration, and meticulously notes exactly what triggered the event.

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SPECIAL EDUCATION TEAM DAILY SCHEDULE

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Collaboration

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The absolute number-one barrier to effective teaming cited in special education literature is a lack of shared planning time. Principals support teams by creatively engineering the school's master schedule to allow for contracted, overlapping time (even 15 minutes daily or 1 hour weekly) for the teacher to instruct, mentor, and debrief with their paraprofessionals (McLeskey et al., 2017).



38

Find the Nooks and Crannies in Your Day



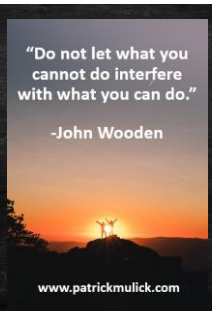
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Bad Nooks and Crannies

- Email-Often misinterpreted, two-way communication could take a long time
- Text-Not everyone is comfortable using their personal communication device
- On an as needed basis-Kids have a talent for taking up your as needed basis time
- While kids are watching videos-Missed classroom instruction time



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Better Nooks and Crannies

- 15 minutes before/after school
- During late start/early release
- While students are engaged in independent learning
- Teaming up with different classroom
- Getting classroom coverage



42

Making Team Planning Time Productive

- This is not coffee hour; there needs to be an agenda and a person leading the meeting and a timekeeper
- Paras get to add to the agenda items
- This is a time to solve problems, not admire them
- Allow for everyone to share, otherwise the loudest voice will get the mic



43

Rules for Collaboration

- Always start with why
- If someone gives you the what, circle them back to why first ("so tell me more" or "help me understand")
- Welcome innovative thinking, but keep an eye on the compass
- Seek to hear, not to be heard (so what I hear you saying.....)
- When introducing innovative thinking, lead with humility and curiosity (What problems would this create? What benefits would this bring? How could we build on .....?)
- If disagreement is seen, start back at why

44

Communication Culture



45

Remember that the classroom is not a democracy, it has one ruling overlord, but an overlord who relies heavily on their high ranking cabinet members.

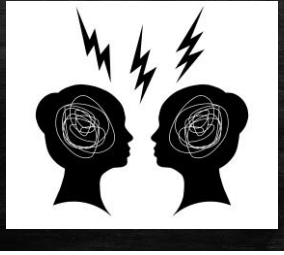


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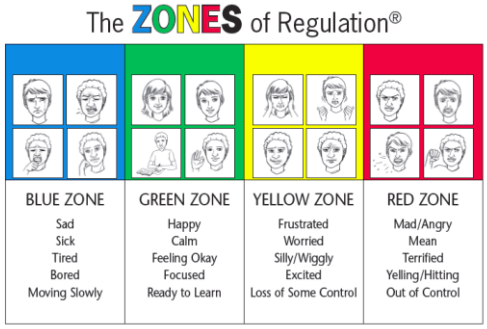
Conflict

47

Dealing with Conflict



48



49

Conflict Resolution (Bonner Foundation 2008)

1. **Identify positions.** Clearly identify what each side is explicitly stating they want. Listen to the surface-level demands or arguments of everyone involved.

2. **Uncover true needs and desires.** Dig deeper to figure out the *why*. What are the actual underlying values, fears, or needs driving those positions?

3. **Ask clarifying questions.** Active listening is key here. Ask open-ended questions to clear up misunderstandings and ensure both sides fully comprehend each other's perspectives.

4. **Brainstorm possible solutions.** Throw out a wide range of ideas to resolve the issue. At this stage, avoid criticizing or immediately shooting down suggestions.

50

Conflict Resolution (Bonner Foundation 2008)

5. **Evaluate impacts and compromise.** Throw out a wide range of ideas to resolve the issue. At this stage, avoid criticizing or immediately shooting down suggestions.

6. **Agree upon a solution.** Select the solution or combination of compromises that best addresses the core needs of both parties and secure a mutual agreement.

7. **Implement the solution.** Actively execute the agreed-upon plan. Everyone must follow through on their specific commitments to change the dynamic.

8. **Re-evaluate if necessary.** Circle back after some time has passed to see if the solution is actually working. If the conflict resurfaces, adjust the plan accordingly.

51

Resolving Team Conflict Requires:

- The place and space
- People who are listening to hear
- Empathy
- Humility
- Flexibility
- Creative problem solving
- The commitment to apologize and move forward

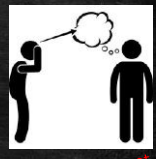
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Coaching

53

Teacher Pitfalls of Training Paraeducators

- Teachers hoping that paras are watching how the they work with kids
- Teachers telling paras what to do without modeling for them
- Teachers giving paras the list of written instructions
- Teachers watching paras do the task but not providing positive feedback
- Teachers hoping paras will just "get it"
- Teachers not taking into consideration how paras best learn



Mindreading: not going to happen

54

The Key to Cloning Yourself

"School-based transdisciplinary teaming relies on moving away from informal, on-the-go conversations toward structured performance feedback loops. When special educators explicitly model evidence-based behavioral strategies and provide immediate, non-punitive feedback, paraprofessionals demonstrate a rapid increase in instructional fidelity."

— Reilly, A. M. (2025). *School-Based Transdisciplinary Teaming to Maximize Behavioral Supports.*



55

The Key to Cloning Yourself: Behavior Skills Training

- **Instruct**- describe the skill, give them the why, and tell them when to use it.
- **Model**-show them how to use the skill with the student(s). Staff need to have complete attention on you, no multi-tasking.
- **Trial**-have the staff member demonstrate the skill. No multi-tasking!
- **Feedback**-both positive and constructive.



56

Educator Regulation

57

An escalated child being directed by an escalated adult never ends well. When student emotions run high, we must come in low and support them through the steps needed to de-escalate. It is only when all parties are calm that we can engage in the problem solving process.

58



Know Yourself

- What are your triggers?
- What behaviors do you engage in when you escalate?
- What helps you de-escalate?
- What is the best way to communicate with you when you are escalated?

59

RESPONDING TO CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR

Self-Reflection Worksheet for Special Education Staff | *Created by Mariah Angele*

Staff Name: _____ **Date:** _____

1. Setting the Stage: My 'Difficult Days' — *What makes it more likely that I'll struggle with focus, memory, or keeping calm? (Check all that apply)*

- ☐ Not enough sleep
- ☐ Financial stress
- ☐ Not feeling well (sick, pain, headache, etc.)
- ☐ Skipping meals / poor nutrition
- ☐ Stress at home
- ☐ Too much screen time / not enough downtime
- ☐ A fight / disagreement with a loved one
- ☐ Other: _____

2. Daily Triggers at Work — *Which parts of the workday are most stressful or triggering for me?*

- ☐ Criticism from colleagues
- ☐ Lack of support / working alone
- ☐ Negative feedback from supervisor
- ☐ Sudden schedule changes
- ☐ Unclear expectations
- ☐ Student transitions (arrival, lunch, recess, etc.)
- ☐ Too many tasks at once
- ☐ Other: _____

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Healthy Habits

61



If you have taught for 20 years and haven't changed your approach at all, you don't have 20 years experience. You have one year of experience that has been done 20 times.

62

I TEACH KIDS WITH AUTISM

AND I LEARN FROM THEM EVERY DAY

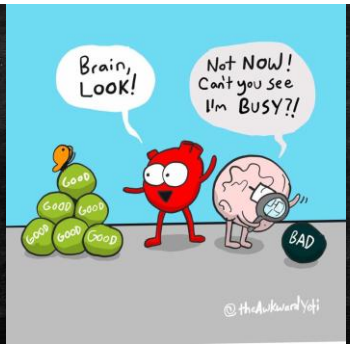
WWW.PATRICKMULICK.COM

63



A major complaint in the literature is that teachers and paraprofessionals are trained separately, resulting in different vocabularies and methodologies. Directors support teaming by funding joint, synchronous professional development on topics like data collection, behavioral interventions, and assistive technology (SmartBrief, 2025).

64



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It is the big things in life that keep the world spinning, and it is the small things in life that make the big things worth doing. Taking the time to celebrate each other is a small thing, and because of that, it is a big thing.



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ALL ABOUT ME

Special Education Teacher and Paraeducator Teaming Profile

Full Name:	Birthday:	What students should call me:

WORK STYLE & ENERGY

How I see myself: ☐ Introvert ☐ Extrovert	My primary orientation: ☐ Task-Driven ☐ People-Driven
Favorite way to recharge during break/lunch:	Favorite way to recharge away from work:

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"You are the thread that supports a day that can be seamless or completely unraveled."

-Analects of Otto



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Thank You!

patrickmulick.com
patrickmulick@gmail.com

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