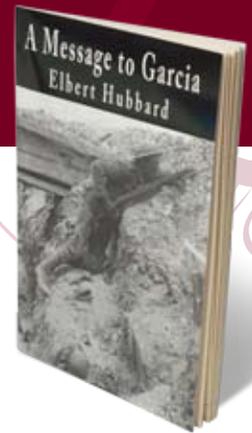


# A Message to Garcia

by Elbert Hubbard



## ***Become a Person of Action***

IT'S NOT ALWAYS THE BEST, BUT THE PROACTIVE,  
WHO SUCCEED

## **QUICK OVERVIEW**

Extremely short and widely published, *A Message to Garcia* was first distributed in 1899 as an article in *The Philistine*, a magazine published by its author, Elbert Hubbard. The introduction to *A Message to Garcia* was added later and explains how the popularity of this classic work grew so quickly. By the time it was published as a booklet in 1914, millions of copies had been printed and distributed. (The exact number is debatable; although Hubbard mentions 40 million, other reports are as low as 9 million.) From the introduction, it seems clear that the mass-produced reprints of *A Message to Garcia* were purchased by company leaders to be given to employees.

Its simple message remains relevant more than a century later: Work quickly and diligently and be loyal to your employer. Hubbard notes that when the economy faces difficult times, jobs may seem scarce, but they are always available to those who exhibit these qualities. Employers are always in need of people to “do the thing,” or commit to the task at hand without needing someone to oversee their work. Using sharp language, Hubbard denounces laziness and admonishes readers to behave like the story’s real-life character Rowan—accept and follow through on a given task without deliberation and despite obstacles.

Because of its brevity, this summary includes an almost-complete version of *A Message to Garcia*. The work is considered public domain and can be downloaded for free online.

## **APPLY AND ACHIEVE**

*A Message to Garcia* is written from an employer’s perspective, but its directives can also be applied to the self-employed. Much of Hubbard’s dispute is with workers who fall into one of three categories:

1. Those who don’t want to work;
2. Those who work only if they’re forced to because an employer is watching; and
3. Those willing to work, but who lack the initiative or perhaps confidence to move forward on a project without clear and constant direction.

Written in 1899 by Elbert Hubbard  
Cover shown: © 2009,  
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## **SUCCESS Points**

***In this book you’ll  
learn how:***

- Self-interest prompts employers to seek out and retain the best
- To know your strengths and be open to instruction
- If you take initiative and are disciplined, your opportunities will always be open to you
- To act with freedom, but realize responsibility is the price of freedom

# SUMMARY

## *A Message to Garcia*

As an entrepreneur or business leader, it's hoped that you don't see yourself in any of these categories. But you wouldn't be alone if the third point stalls your business from time to time. Entrepreneurs, and solopreneurs in particular, are faced with numerous decisions on a daily basis. It's easy to become tangled in the process of pondering which step to take next, how to take it, who you should involve, how much to invest, etc. Certainly, it's important to weigh the pros and cons of any important decision, but when it comes to achievement, the ability to "do the thing," to take action, is what yields profitable results.

Hubbard also makes it clear that it's essential to be disciplined in one's work—whether you're working for an employer or for yourself. Establishing a schedule and creating a clear list of priorities are activities that can help you stay on task and ultimately achieve your goals. If you are an employer, consider the wisdom of retaining employees who can work successfully without oversight. This enables you to delegate tasks and be assured that while you are doing what only you can do, operations in the office as well as at home will continue to run smoothly.

**T**his literary trifle, *A Message to Garcia*, was written one evening after supper, in a single hour. It was on the Twenty-second of February, Eighteen Hundred Ninety-nine, Washington's Birthday, and we were just going to press with the March *Philistine*. The thing leaped hot from my heart, written after a trying day, when I had been endeavoring to train some rather delinquent villagers to abjure the comatose state and get radio-active.

The immediate suggestion, though, came from a little argument over the teacups, when my boy Bert suggested that Rowan was the real hero of the Cuban War. Rowan had gone alone and done the thing—carried the message to Garcia. It came to me like a flash! Yes, the boy is right; the hero is the man who does his work—who carries the message to Garcia. I got up from the table, and wrote *A Message to Garcia*. I thought so little of it that we ran it in the magazine without a heading. The edition went out, and soon orders began to come for extra copies of the March *Philistine*, a dozen, 50, 100; and when the American News Company ordered 1,000, I asked one of my helpers which article it was that had stirred up the cosmic dust.

"It's the stuff about Garcia," he said.

The next day a telegram came from George H. Daniels, of the New York Central Railroad, thus: "Give price on 100,000

Rowan article in pamphlet form—Empire State Express advertisement on Back—also how soon can ship."

I replied giving price, and stated we could supply the pamphlets in two years. Our facilities were small and a hundred thousand booklets looked like an awful undertaking.

The result was that I gave Mr. Daniels permission to reprint the article in his own way. He issued it in booklet form in editions of half a million. Two or three of these half-million lots were sent out by Mr. Daniels, and in addition the article was reprinted in over 200 magazines and newspapers. It has been translated into all written languages.

At the time Mr. Daniels was distributing *A Message to Garcia*, Prince Hilakoff, Director of Russian Railways, was in this country. He was the guest of the New York Central, and made a tour of the country under the personal direction of Mr. Daniels. The Prince saw the little book and was interested in it, more

## Loyal in Word and Deed

If you work for a man, in Heaven's name, work for him. If he pays wages that supply you your bread and butter, work for him, speak well of him, think well of him, and stand by him, and stand by the institution he represents. I think if I worked for a man, I would work for him. I would not work for him a part of his time, but all of his time. I would give an undivided service or none.

If put to the pinch, an ounce of loyalty is worth a pound of cleverness. If you must vilify, condemn, and eternally disparage, why, resign your position, and when you are outside, damn to your heart's content. But, I pray you, so long as you are a part of an institution, do not condemn it. Not that you will injure the institution—not that—but when you disparage the concern of which you are a part, you disparage yourself.

And, don't forget—"I forgot" won't do in business.

because Mr. Daniels was putting it out in such big numbers, probably, than otherwise.

In any event, when he got home he had the matter translated into Russian, and a copy of the booklet given to every railroad employee in Russia.

Other countries then took it up, and from Russia it passed into Germany, France, Spain, Turkey, Hindustan and China. During the war between Russia and Japan, every Russian soldier who went to the front was given a copy of the *A Message to Garcia*.

The Japanese, finding the booklets in possession of the Russian prisoners, concluded that it must be a good thing, and accordingly translated it into Japanese.

And on an order of the Mikado, a copy was given to every man in the employ of the Japanese Government, soldier or civilian. Over forty million copies of *A Message to Garcia* have been printed.

This is said to be a larger circulation than any other literary venture has ever attained during the lifetime of the author, in all history—thanks to a series of lucky accidents! —E.H.

## A MESSAGE TO GARCIA

*As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him: For he refresheth the soul of his masters.*

—Proverbs 25:13

In all this Cuban business there is one man who stands out on the horizon of my memory like Mars at perihelion.

## DELIVER THE MESSAGE

When war broke out between Spain and the United States, it was very necessary to communicate quickly with the leader of the Insurgents. Garcia was somewhere in the mountain fastnesses of Cuba—no one knew where. No mail or telegraph message could reach him. The President must secure his co-operation, and quickly. What to do!

Someone said to the President, “There is a fellow by the name of Rowan [who] will find Garcia for you, if anybody can.”

Rowan was sent for and was given a letter to be delivered to Garcia. How “the fellow by the name of Rowan” took the letter, sealed it up in an oilskin pouch, strapped it over his heart, in four days landed by night off the coast of Cuba from an open boat, disappeared into the jungle, and in three weeks came out

on the other side of the Island, having traversed a hostile country on foot, and delivered his letter to Garcia—are things I have no special desire now to tell in detail.

The point that I wish to make is this: McKinley gave Rowan a letter to be delivered to Garcia; Rowan took the letter and did not ask, “Where is he at?” By the Eternal! There is a man whose form should be cast in deathless bronze and the statue placed in every college of the land. It is not book-learning young men need, nor instruction about this and that, but a stiffening of the vertebrae which will cause them to be loyal to a trust, to act promptly, concentrate their energies: do the thing—“Carry a message to Garcia.”

General Garcia is dead now, but there are other Garcias.

No man who has endeavored to carry out an enterprise where many hands were needed, but has been well-nigh appalled at times by the imbecility of the average man—the inability or unwillingness to concentrate on a thing and do it.

## TAKE INITIATIVE

Slipshod assistance, foolish inattention, dowdy indifference, and half-hearted work seem the rule; and no man succeeds, unless by hook or crook or threat he forces or bribes other men to assist him; or mayhap, God in His goodness performs a miracle, and sends him an Angel of Light for an assistant. You, reader, put this matter to a test: You are sitting now in your office—six clerks are within call. Summon any one and make this request: “Please look in the encyclopedia and make a brief memorandum for me concerning the life of Correggio.”

Will the clerk quietly say, “Yes, sir,” and go do the task?

On your life he will not. He will look at you out of a fishy eye and ask one or more of the following questions:

Who was he?

Which encyclopedia?

Where is the encyclopedia?

Was I hired for that?

Don't you mean Bismarck?

What's the matter with Charlie doing it?

Is he dead?

Is there any hurry?

Shall I bring you the book and let you look it up yourself?

What do you want to know for?

I wasn't hired for that anyway!

And I will lay you ten to one that after you have answered the questions, and explained how to find the information, and why you want it, the clerk will go off and get one of the other clerks to help him try to find [Correggio]—and then come back and tell you there is no such man. Of course I may lose my bet, but according to the Law of Average I will not.

Now, if you are wise, you will not bother to explain to your “assistant” that Correggio is indexed under the C’s, not in the K’s, but you will smile very sweetly and say, “Never mind,” and go look it up yourself.

## WORK WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING

And this incapacity for independent action, this moral stupidity, this infirmity of the will, this unwillingness to cheerfully catch hold and lift—these are the things that put pure Socialism so far into the future. If men will not act for themselves, what will they do when the benefit of their effort is for all? A first mate with knotted club seems necessary; and the dread of getting “the bounce” Saturday night holds many a worker to his place.

Advertise for a stenographer, and nine out of ten who apply can neither spell nor punctuate—and do not think it necessary to.

Can such a one write a letter to Garcia?

“You see that bookkeeper,” said a foreman to me in a large factory.

“Yes; what about him?”

“Well, he’s a fine accountant, but if I’d send him up-town on an errand, he might accomplish the errand all right, and on the other hand, might stop at four saloons on the way, and when he got to Main Street would forget what he had been sent for.”

Can such a man be entrusted to carry a message to Garcia?

We have recently been hearing much maudlin sympathy expressed for the “downtrodden denizens of the sweat-shop” and the “homeless wanderer searching for honest employment,” and with it all often go any hard words for the men in power.

Nothing is said about the employer who grows old before his time in a vain attempt to get frowsy ne’er-do-wells to do intelligent work; and his long, patient striving with “help” that does nothing but loaf when his back is turned. In every store and factory there is a constant weeding-out process going on. The employer is continually sending away “help” that have shown their incapacity to further the interests of the business, and others are being taken on.

No matter how good times are, this sorting continues: only if times are hard and work is scarce, the sorting is done finer—but out and forever out the incompetent and unworthy go. It is the survival of the fittest. Self-interest prompts every employer to keep the best—those who can carry a message to Garcia.

I know one man of really brilliant parts who has not the ability to manage a business of his own, and yet who is absolutely worthless to anyone else, because he carries with him constantly the insane suspicion that his employer is oppressing, or intending to oppress, him. He cannot give orders; and he will not receive them. Should a message be given him to take to Garcia, his answer would probably be, “Take it yourself!”

Tonight this man walks the streets looking for work, the wind whistling through his threadbare coat. No one who knows him dare employ him, for he is a regular firebrand of discontent. He is impervious to reason, and the only thing that can impress him is the toe of a thick-soled Number Nine boot.

Of course I know that one so morally deformed is no less to be pitied than a physical cripple; but in our pitying let us drop a tear, too, for the men who are striving to carry on a great enterprise, whose working hours are not limited by the whistle, and whose hair is fast turning white through the struggle to hold in line dowdy indifference, slipshod imbecility, and the heartless ingratitude which, but for their enterprise, would be both hungry and homeless.

## OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND

Have I put the matter too strongly? Possibly I have; but when all the world has gone a-slumming I wish to speak a word of sympathy for the man who succeeds—the man who, against great odds, has directed the efforts of others, and having succeeded, finds there’s nothing in it: nothing but bare board and clothes. I have carried a dinner-pail and worked for day’s wages, and I have also been an employer of labor, and I know there is something to be said on both sides. There is no excellence, per se, in poverty; rags are no recommendation; and all employers are not rapacious and high-handed, any more than all poor men are virtuous.

My heart goes out to the man who does his work when the “boss” is away, as well as when he is at home. And the man who, when given a letter for Garcia, quietly takes the missive, without asking any idiotic questions, and with no lurking intention of chucking it into the nearest sewer, or of doing aught else but

# SUMMARY

## *A Message to Garcia*

deliver it, never gets “laid off,” nor has to go on a strike for higher wages. Civilization is one long, anxious search for just such individuals. Anything such a man asks shall be granted. His kind is so rare that no employer can afford to let him go. He is wanted in every city, town and village—in every office, shop, store and factory.

The world cries out for such: he is needed, and needed badly—the man who can carry A MESSAGE TO GARCIA.

To act in absolute freedom and at the same time know that responsibility is the price of freedom is salvation.

## NOTES AND QUOTES

Elbert Hubbard was a free-thinker and “benevolent capitalist” whose writings and lectures inspired people to strive for excellence. He was the founder of the Roycroft colony, a community of artists and craftsmen in East Aurora, N.Y. The Roycroft Press was the first facility on the property. As Hubbard’s publishing house, the press distributed finely bound books in addition to two magazines, *The Philistine* and *The Fra*.

The artisans who visited and lived in the Roycroft Inn and community were known for their craftsmanship. They created much-sought-after pieces, including leather and metalwork and Mission-style furniture. Roycroft Shop became a gathering place for other free-thinkers, where “radicals” met to discuss and promote reform and women’s voting rights.

Some of his writing and behavior was considered to be eccentric, and, indeed, some of his work might still be considered “out there” today. But there is much that can be learned from Hubbard, as well. He capitalized on opportunities, pursued his heart’s desire and believed in an unquestionable work ethic. And in the following segment from another of Hubbard’s books, *Love, Life & Work*, we learn from his point of view on accessing the greatness within you.

## TIME AND CHANCE

The first point is that there is not so very much difference in the intelligence of people after all. The great man is not so great as folks think, and the dull man is not quite so stupid as he seems. The difference in our estimates of men lies in the fact that one individual is able to get his goods into the show-window, and the other is not aware that he has any show-window or any goods.

“The soul knows all things, and knowledge is only a remembering,” Emerson says.

This seems a very broad statement; and yet, the fact remains that the vast majority of men know a thousand times as much as they are aware of. Far down in the silent depths of subconsciousness lie myriads of truths, each awaiting a time when its owner shall call it forth. To utilize these stored-up thoughts, you must express them to others. And to be able to express them well, your soul has to soar into this subconscious realm where you have cached these net results of experience. In other words, you must “come out”—get out of self—away from self-consciousness, into the region of partial oblivion—away from the boundaries of time and the limitations of space. The great painter forgets all in the presence of his canvas; the writer is oblivious to his surroundings; the singer floats away on the

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**To act in absolute freedom and at the same time know that responsibility is the price of freedom is salvation.**

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wings of melody (and carries the audience with her); the orator pours out his soul for an hour, and it seems to him as if barely five minutes had passed, so rapt is he in his exalted theme. When you reach the heights of sublimity and are expressing your highest and best, you are in a partial-trance condition. And all men who enter this condition surprise themselves by the quantity of knowledge and the extent of insight they possess. And some going a little deeper than others into this trance condition, and having no knowledge of the miraculous storing up of truth in the subconscious cells, jump to the conclusion that their intelligence is guided by a spirit not theirs. When one reaches this conclusion, he begins to wither at the top, for he relies on the dead, and ceases to feed the well-springs of his subconscious self.

The mind is a dual affair—objective and subjective. The objective mind sees all, hears all, reasons things out. The subjective mind stores up and only gives out when the objective

# SUMMARY

## *A Message to Garcia*

mind sleeps. And as few men ever cultivate the absorbed, reflective or semi-trance state, where the objective mind rests, they never really call on their subconscious treasury for its stores. They are always self-conscious.

A man in commerce, where men prey on their kind, must be alive and alert to what is going on, or while he dreams, his competitor will seize upon his birthright.

And the summing up of this sermonette is that all men are equally rich, only some thru fate are able to muster their mental legions on the plains of their being and count them, while others are never able to do so.

But what think you is necessary before a person can come into full possession of his subconscious treasures? Well, I'll tell you: It is not ease, nor prosperity, nor requited love, nor worldly security—not these.

“You sing well,” said the master, impatiently, to his best pupil, “but you will never sing divinely until you have given your all for love, and then been neglected and rejected, and scorned and beaten, and left for dead. Then, if you do not exactly die, you will come back, and when the world hears your voice, it will mistake you for an angel and fall at your feet.”

And the moral is, that as long as you are satisfied and comfortable, you use only the objective mind and live in the world of sense. But let love be torn from your grasp and flee as a shadow—living only as a memory in a haunting sense of loss; let death come and the sky shut down over less worth in the world; or stupid misunderstanding and crushing defeat grind you into the dust, then you may arise, forgetting time and space and self, and take refuge in mansions not made with hands; and find a certain sad, sweet satisfaction in the contemplation of treasures stored up where moths and rust do not corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal.

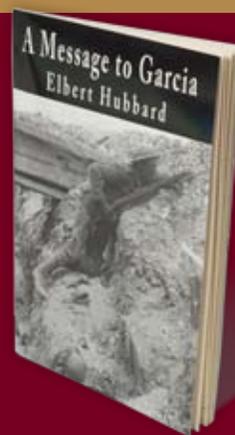
## Recommended Reading

If you enjoyed *A Message to Garcia*, you may also want to read:

**The Way to Wealth** by Benjamin Franklin

**Eight Pillars of Prosperity** by James Allen

**Napoleon Hill's Golden Rules** by Napoleon Hill



## About the Author

Writer, publisher and American philosopher Elbert Hubbard (1856–1915) applied the initiative he speaks of in *A Message to Garcia* to his first career as a junior partner and salesman for the Larkin Company, a soap maker. He was exceptionally successful in this role, and after 12 years with the company, Hubbard sold his share of the Larkin Company for \$75,000. His goal was to pursue his passion for writing.

In 1895, he founded Roycroft Press. Hubbard is described as a headstrong, opinionated individual who determined that if other publishers would not print his novels or articles, he would do so himself. He freely shared his political and religious viewpoints and was well-known for motivational messages, such as, “A little more persistence, a little more effort, and what seemed hopeless failure may turn to glorious success,” and “Character is the result of two things: mental attitude and the way we spend our time.”

His second wife, Alice, was a feminist and a suffragist. The Hubbards were lost at sea while traveling to Europe aboard the *Lusitania* when it was torpedoed by a German submarine on May 7, 1915.

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