

A Message to
Garcia

ELBERT HUBBARD

A MESSAGE TO GARCIA

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Foreword

I am passionate about old self-help writings, especially from the early 20th century. This work has been republished with my additional annotations and interpretations, adding timeless principles and explanations to illustrate its continued relevance today. I hope you find these insights valuable as you explore this classic text.

My journey into self-help began in college when I stumbled upon Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. From that point on, I was hooked. For a long time, I thought something was fundamentally wrong with me, so I embarked on a 20-year quest to perfect myself. Spoiler alert: it wasn't all sunshine and rainbows. There were plenty of moments filled with misery and discomfort.

Here's the thing about self-help books—they're only as good as the effort you put into applying their wisdom. Otherwise, they're just another bedtime story. Back then, I had a pretty negative view of the world and thought self-help was just another part of that negativity. But things started changing when I stopped doing the wrong things and started doing more of the right ones.

There are no real secrets in self-help, no matter what the latest internet guru tries to sell you. The principles in these classic texts have stood the test of time for a reason—they work if you work them. So, dive in, absorb the wisdom, and most importantly, put it to use. Let's explore these timeless teachings together and discover how they can still improve our lives today.

Matt Santi, Editor
IQ Self LLC

Why "A Message to Garcia" Is Still Relevant Today

Timeless Principles

Elbert Hubbard's essay, "A Message to Garcia," hinges on the timeless principles of initiative, loyalty, and self-reliance. The narrative revolves around First Lieutenant Andrew S. Rowan's mission to deliver a message to General Garcia during the Cuban War—a task accomplished without hesitation or questions.

This unwavering dedication to fulfilling a responsibility resonates profoundly even today. In a world where distractions are rampant and shortcuts are often sought, Hubbard's call for focused effort and reliability serves as a crucial reminder that sometimes, just getting the job done is paramount.

Updated Interpretations

Fast forward to today, and the principles enshrined in "A Message to Garcia" still hold water—perhaps even more so in our increasingly complex world. Here's how these principles can be translated into contemporary settings:

Workplace Efficiency: Modern workplaces benefit immensely from employees who take initiative without requiring micromanagement. Rowan's example teaches current professionals to embrace challenges head-on, fostering an environment where self-starters thrive and drive organizations forward.

Entrepreneurship: For entrepreneurs, the ability to act decisively and independently is often the difference between success and failure. Hubbard's essay provides a blueprint for aspiring business leaders to navigate the uncertainties of entrepreneurship with tenacity and clear purpose.

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Education: The education system can draw from Hubbard's emphasis on practical action over theoretical knowledge. Encouraging students to develop problem-solving skills and a proactive attitude can prepare them better for real-world challenges, creating a generation of doers rather than passive learners.

Personal Development: On a personal level, adopting the mindset advocated in the essay can lead to significant growth. Whether it's learning a new skill, pursuing a passion project, or simply managing daily tasks with more independence and reliability, the lessons from "A Message to Garcia" foster a greater sense of personal responsibility and self-esteem.

While Elbert Hubbard wrote "A Message to Garcia" over a century ago, its core message remains strikingly pertinent. It cuts through the noise of modern life to remind us of the fundamental values that drive true success and fulfillment. So, next time you find yourself buried under a pile of tasks, remember Rowan and think, "What would he do?" Then get up, take the message, and deliver it—no questions asked.

Historical Context

Elbert Hubbard was an American writer, publisher, artist, and philosopher, born in 1856 in Bloomington, Illinois. After exploring various business ventures, his life changed when he founded the Roycroft artisan community in East Aurora, New York.

This community became a hub for the Arts and Crafts Movement, focusing on handcrafted goods and promoting artistic integrity. Hubbard's motivations were rooted in his belief in self-reliance and individualism, themes that permeated his works, including his famous essay, "A Message to Garcia."

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His life experiences greatly influenced his writing. His passion for hard work and dedication stemmed from his relentless pursuit of excellence and innovation. Known for his unconventional approach to life and business, Hubbard expressed his ideas with a mix of wit and practicality. This unique voice made his works both engaging and influential during his time.

The late 19th century, when "A Message to Garcia" was written, was a time of significant change. The United States was emerging as an industrial power, marked by rapid technological advancements and shifts in society. The Spanish-American War (1898) provided the backdrop for Hubbard's essay, emphasizing the need for quick, decisive action in crises.

Culturally, this era stressed patriotism and duty, influenced by the Civil War and a growing national identity. Values of hard work, loyalty, and perseverance were celebrated, aligning with the core message of Hubbard's essay.

The popularity of "A Message to Garcia" also stemmed from the emerging culture of self-help and personal development. As America defined its place in the world, individuals sought guidance on navigating this new landscape. Hubbard's essay offered a straightforward approach to personal responsibility and initiative, resonating with readers from various backgrounds.

Author's Introduction

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.

This 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.

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The edition went out, and soon orders began to come for extra copies of the March "Philistine," a dozen, fifty, a hundred; and when the American News Company ordered a thousand, 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 one hundred thousand 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 two hundred magazines and newspapers. It has been translated into all written languages.

At the time Mr. Daniels was distributing the "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 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.

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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 "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.

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."

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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, landed by night off the coast of Cuba from an open boat in four days, 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.

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."

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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 Garcia—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.

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 a 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.

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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 uptown 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 many 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.

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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.

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.

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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 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

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

Life In Abundance

The supreme prayer of my heart is not to be learned or "good," but to be Radiant.

I desire to radiate health, cheerfulness, sincerity, calm courage, and goodwill.

I wish to be simple, honest, natural, frank, clean in mind and clean in body, unaffected—ready to say, "I do not know," if so it be, to meet all men on an absolute equality—to face any obstacle and meet every difficulty unafraid and unabashed.

I wish others to live their lives, too, up to their highest, fullest, and best. To that end, I pray that I may never meddle, dictate, interfere, give advice that is not wanted, nor assist when my services are not needed.

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If I can help people, I'll do it by giving them a chance to help themselves; and if I can uplift or inspire, let it be by example, inference, and suggestion, rather than by injunction and dictation. That is to say, I desire to be Radiant—to Radiate Life.

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How do you define loyalty in your life?

Reflect on what loyalty means to you personally and professionally. Consider moments where your loyalty was tested and how you responded. Did you stand by your commitments, or did you waver? What can you learn from these experiences?

What are your most significant challenges in taking initiative?

Think about the times when you've been hesitant to take action without explicit instructions. What barriers do you face—fear of failure, lack of confidence, or perhaps uncertainty about your capabilities?

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In what ways can you cultivate self-reliance? Consider areas of your life where you rely heavily on others.

How can you begin to shift towards greater self-reliance? This might mean learning new skills, improving your problem-solving abilities, or simply becoming more decisive.

Develop a "No Questions Asked" Task Approach: For the next week, whenever you're assigned a task, commit to completing it with minimal questions and maximum effort.

Approach each task as if it's your personal "message to Garcia." Document your experiences, noting any improvements in efficiency and satisfaction.

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Journaling Prompt: "Write about a time when you took initiative without being asked.

What was the outcome? How did it make you feel? What did you learn from the experience?"

Goal-Setting Activity: Identify a challenging goal that aligns with the principles of "A Message to Garcia."

Break this goal down into smaller, manageable tasks. Set deadlines for each task and track your progress. Celebrate small victories along the way to stay motivated.

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Implement a Daily Self-Reflection Routine: Spend 15 minutes each day reflecting on your actions and decisions.

Ask yourself if you acted with initiative and loyalty, and identify areas for improvement. This simple routine can significantly enhance your self-awareness and drive personal growth.

Create a Personal Responsibility Accountability Chart: Make a chart that lists your key responsibilities both at work and in personal life.

For each responsibility, set clear, actionable goals and deadlines. Hold yourself accountable, reviewing progress at the end of each week. Adjust as necessary to ensure continuous improvement.

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