

A Message to Garcia and Your Career

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

One of the most inspiring true stories I have ever read is *A Message to Garcia*, by Elbert Hubbard. It is a short essay that discusses the initiative of a soldier who is assigned a difficult mission of delivering a message and comes through, completing this very difficult task. In the essay, the soldier does not ask any questions, object to the assignment, nor request help; he simply gets the job done. The essay was first published in the March 1899 issue of *Philistine* magazine and soon thereafter was reprinted as a pamphlet and a book. In both World War I and World War II the article was given to every enlisted person in the U.S. Marines and the U.S. Navy. The short essay was even made into a silent film by Thomas Edison, Inc. in 1916. *The Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature* calls the piece "one of the most extraordinary documents ever issued in the United States".

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 vastness of Cuba- no one knew where. No mail nor telegraph message could reach him. The President must secure his cooperation, and quickly.

What to do!

Someone said to the President, "There's a fellow by the name of Rowan will find Garcia for you, if anybody can."

Rowan was sent for and given a letter to be delivered to Garcia. How "the fellow by the name of Rowan" took the letter, sealed it up in an oil-skin 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 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".

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?

Shan't I bring you the book and let you look it up yourself?

What do you want to know for?

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 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, 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 the 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 denizen 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 constantly 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 any one 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 fire-brand of discontent. He is impervious to reason, and the only thing that can impress him is the toe of a thick-soled No. 9 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.

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 take 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 a message to Garcia.

In all my studies of success, I do not think I have ever encountered a better message in terms of what it takes to be successful than *A Message to Garcia*. The reason that this is such a strong message is because it really delves into the essence of what it takes to be successful in any undertaking and in life itself. The essay has been translated into 37 languages and at the time it was first written, it sold over 40,000,000 copies.

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I have been studying successful people most of my life. I read biographies and I seek out successful people and speak to them. When I was in college I used to write long papers about people who were very successful. I would use money I saved up and fly around the country interviewing these people, and then I would write a paper about them and give talks to other college students about all my findings. I think my professors found it interesting, so they would invite me to lecture classes I was not even taking, to share all that I had learned.

When I was in law school I did the same thing with certain lawyers. I wrote a 400-page paper/unpublished book about successful attorneys and what made them successful. I spent months traveling the United States interviewing famous attorneys for that book. I then was invited to lecture other [law students](#) about what made these certain attorneys successful, just like when I was in college. Then I became a legal recruiter and started combing through thousands of resumes a week to [find attorneys](#) likely to be successful in law firms. I loved doing this.

I wanted to be successful and felt that in order to succeed I needed to understand how others had become successful.

I have met many of the most educated people with the most prestigious jobs. I have met also people with no formal education who have very prestigious jobs. I have oft traveled to seminars around the world several times in a year, just to learn from successful people what has made them good and bad at whatever it is that they do. Each day for this past year I have written daily about the traits that make people successful, and I also read and study this subject each day. As a student of success, I love learning about what makes one person more successful than another and then communicating my findings to others.

I am not sure why I have had such a passion about studying success. Maybe it is because success always seemed to elude my parents, which made them very unhappy. Our family always had financial problems growing up, for example, there

was always a ton of talk about how there was not enough money for this and for that. It was a daily sort of thing. There was also a feeling of isolation, I think, that my parents had, because they were not as successful as a lot of people around them. I picked this up as well. The environments I grew up in always emphasized success, and yet it was something that eluded my family. For whatever reason, I picked up a message that success was incredibly important and at an early age I began working on figuring out the rules.

From the time I was 10 years old or so, I decided that I needed to be successful because I certainly could not change my family. I started getting paper routes and doing everything within my power to be successful. I was reading self improvement books by the age of 14 or so, and doing everything I could to become whatever success seemed to represent.

That said, I feel that I have a lot to teach. For 25+ years now, I have been studying success in one form or another, and today it occurred to me that I understand the most important thing that can make anyone successful. It can be you, someone you know, your child,... literally anyone. Being successful is not something that needs to elude you and the components of success are available to you right now; just keep the following in mind:

- It does not matter what titles you have had.
- It does not matter what other people say about you.
- It does not matter if you do a job that is respected by society or not.
- It does not matter if you went to college.
- It does not matter if you work for a prestigious employer or not.
- It does not matter if you received a bonus.
- It does not matter if the economy is good or bad.

None of this matters at all. When it comes right down to it, there are many things you cannot change about yourself. You can try as you might, but there are a ton of things about yourself that may seem to *matter*, which in the long run are not going to be important. If you define success by any of these factors you are never going to be successful.

The people who have inspired me the most on the road to success are those who became successful despite not having all the advantages. When you read biographies of successful people, you will often find that they have overcome incredible obstacles. They have overcome dyslexia, illness, various handicaps, abuse, and more. They have gone through hell and come through the other side and have often achieved everything without the benefit of formal education, or even the support of family and friends. This is a large part of what makes their success so admirable.

The greatest thing that makes people successful, in my opinion, is their ability to act promptly, concentrate their energies, and get something done. It is all about attitude. A good attitude and taking pride in what one does is the most important attribute anyone can possess.

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Yesterday I was in New York. I went up to a street vendor and he made me a piece of chicken. He was incredibly happy about the work he was doing, making the piece of chicken with enthusiasm. He smiled as he created my lunch, and asked me five or six different questions about how I liked my chicken. He seemed genuinely happy and engrossed in the simple act of creating a chicken kabob. I realized that this man liked his work so much that there was no doubt that he went home enthusiastic at the end of each evening. I can assume he probably has very good relationships and he is "integrated" because of his enthusiasm for what he does, and due to the pride he takes in his work.

The chicken was delicious; needless to say the next time I am in New York I will seek him out. It is great being around people who like their job and who take pride in doing great work.

A street vendor in New York may seem an odd person to name as the pinnacle of success; however, in reality, I find this example to be incredibly powerful. Virtually everyone I know, if they were forced to be working over a little coal stove across from Central Park making chicken kabobs all day, would be pissed off and frustrated. They would not put their heart and soul into the work and therefore they would not try their hardest. They would not be beaming with enthusiasm, and when they would go home at night, they would be angry about their work, which they would probably even take it out on their families. Life for them would be one complaint after another about this and about that.

While this perception may sound extreme, this is how most people are with their jobs regardless of what they are doing. They may not be completely upset, yet they always have a certain amount of resentment, which carries over into everything they do. They do not put themselves behind their work, nor do they have a lot of pride in what they do, or the people they are working with and for. They are mostly indifferent. They misdiagnose and never complete a task with any passion. They are simply not present.

A couple of weeks ago, I decided to hook up a couple of additional monitors to my computer. I had a computer person help me with the task and they were able to connect two monitors but not three. "You need a new computer if you are going to run three monitors..." they told me. They did not want to sell me a new computer, they just told me I basically needed to throw away my computer and spend \$1,000 on a new one. I started shopping for a computer. I had someone else look at my computer and within 30 seconds they got all three monitors working just by opening a program in the computer which was already pre-installed on the machine. This sort of thing is typical because most people simply do not think through problems as much as they should. They do not care.

What is the harm in this? The harm is huge. I will not work with the person who did a half-hearted job on my computer again. Why would I hire him? Next time I will simply choose to hire the other man. Every day many of us are losing or gaining the next job, whether we are working or not. Our reputation for doing quality work or not is something that very quickly gets around.

When I was working in a [law firm](#), I remember that the best thing that could happen to you was to get repeat assignments from the partners you were working for. If people gave you work a second time that meant they liked your work. You needed to do your work well and with passion to get more work. If they did not like your work, they did not give you repeat assignments. Attorneys who did not get repeat assignments eventually had no work, and without work they very quickly

would find themselves with nothing to do and then soon after that--no jobs. This process repeated itself in law firms all the time and all over.

Last week I had a piece of exercise equipment in my house that was broken. I summoned a repairman to come out to the house.

"You need a new display," he told me while presenting me with a bill of \$140 for a diagnosis of what was wrong with the exercise equipment. "The display will probably cost \$1,000 or so and I will order it and install it for you when it comes in."

"A new display, that's impossible!" I told him. "The display works fine."

"Oh, then it must be the capacitor. I'll order one of those. Those are around \$1,200, I think. Now the bill for today is \$140 and I will come back when I get the part."

The man did not know what he was doing and he did not appear to care one way or another. What was so upsetting to me about the experience was the complete apathy and lack of concern. I called the manufacturer of the exercise equipment and explained the situation. They were very helpful and apologetic. They came through and fixed it for me for free. People do not respect those who do half-hearted work and who are indifferent. We want to work with people who care about their jobs and put their heart and soul into it. Who knows what happened to that repairman. You need to give it your all.

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 constantly 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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What most people do not understand is that there is a constant sorting out going on with all companies and organizations. Employers know who is working hard and putting their soul into the job and who is not. When people lose jobs it is often because they are the ones who are seen as not able to further the interests of the employer. Those who gossip about their employer at work, harbor a suspicion of their employer about this or that, watch the clock, do half-hearted work, and do not put in their all are always the first to be let go.

Regardless of the economy, employers want to keep around those who are furthering their interests, and to get rid of those who are not. Again, it is really about your attitude. Your attitude is what carries the day.

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 take 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 a message to Garcia.

I do not care if you are a doorman in a building, a street vendor, the [Chief Executive](#) of a major corporation, an important attorney--or whatever. You need to be the person who can carry a message to Garcia. This person is the person who gains the respect of people, who never loses a job and who is, paradoxically, often the happiest in everything he does. Carry that message to Garcia and be the person who is strong, well respected, and who can complete a mission of importance in the world. Apply yourself and have the attitude of the man who carried the message to Garcia.

THE LESSON

People owe their success to concentrating their energies and taking prompt action; they understand the importance of maintaining a positive attitude. People notice and gravitate towards those with a positive approach to their work, just as they notice -- and do not respect - indifference and half-hearted work. A positive attitude, therefore, is your greatest asset.

Read More About Why Your Attitude is Just as Important as the Quality of Your Work:

- [Are You a Critic](#)
- [Sick Crows, Your Attitude and Being on the Winning Team](#)
- [See Your Job and the World from the Bright Side and Not the Dark Side](#)