

A Message to Garcia

Elbert Hubbard, 1899

Adapted for a new generation of dreamers, doers, and entrepreneurs.

“Carry a message to Garcia.”

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Editor's note: This essay grew out of the Spanish-American War of 1898. Cuba was fighting for its independence from Spain, and General Calixto García led the Cuban rebels. When the United States entered the war, President McKinley needed to coordinate with García, but no one knew exactly where in the Cuban mountains he was hiding. A young officer, Lieutenant Andrew Rowan, volunteered to find him and deliver a message, and against enormous odds, he did. Hubbard turned that single act into one of the most reprinted essays in history. As you read, see if you can name which of Napoleon Hill's Laws of Success it illustrates most clearly. The trait it points to is the one that quietly makes a person impossible to replace, in any business and in any era.

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In all this Cuban business there is one man stands out on the horizon of my memory like a lighthouse on the coast of a dark and stormy sea.

When war broke out between Spain and the United States, it was very necessary to communicate quickly with the leader of the rebels. Garcia was somewhere in the mountain wilderness of Cuba. No one knew where. No message could reach him. The President must secure his co-operation, and quickly.

What to do!

Someone said, "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 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 having 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: the President 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 in the land. It is not book-learning young people need, nor instruction about this or that, but a stiffening of the spine 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 one who has endeavored to carry out an enterprise where many hands were needed, but has been well-nigh appalled at times by the ineptitude of the average person: the inability or unwillingness to concentrate on a thing and do it.

Sloppy assistance, foolish inattention, lifeless indifference, and half-hearted work seem the rule; and no one succeeds, unless by hook or crook, or threat, he forces or bribes others to assist him; or perhaps, 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 reading this essay right now. Six people are within a message's reach. Call on any one and make this request: "Pull together a quick summary of Napoleon Hill, who he was and what he actually taught."

Will they quietly say, "On it," and go do the task?

Not a chance. They'll look at you with a blank stare, and fire back one or more of these:

Who's that?

How do you spell it?

Where do you want me to look? His books, or just Google?

I'm too busy.

Don't you mean Napoleon Bonaparte?

Can't someone else handle this?

Is he still alive?

Do you need this today?

Want me to just send you a link and you can skim it?

What do you need it for?



And I'll bet you ten to one that after you've answered every question, and explained where to look, and why you want it, they'll go pull someone else off their own work to help them find Garcia, or come back with more questions instead of a finished task. I might lose that bet. But going by the law of averages, I won't.

Now if you're wise, you won't bother explaining that Hill wrote *Think and Grow Rich*, not the guy who conquered Europe. You'll just smile, say "never mind," and go do it yourself. This inability to act on your own, to just catch hold and lift, is what holds people back, no matter how good the opportunity sitting right in front of them.

A pair of eyes constantly watching seems necessary; and the threat of getting fired is the only motivation for keeping most people on the job, barely. Advertise for help and nine times out of ten who apply can neither spell nor punctuate, and do not think it necessary to do so. Can such a one carry 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 to town on an errand, he might accomplish the errand all right, and, on the other hand, might stop at four bars 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 hear a lot of sympathy expressed for the low income earners and those struggling to make ends meet, and along with it plenty of hard words for the successful entrepreneurs. Nothing is said about the one who grows old prematurely in a vain attempt to get unmotivated people to do good work; or the long, patient striving with "help" that does nothing but "slack off" the moment the back is turned.

In every business there is a constant weeding-out process going on. "Help" that's shown their incapacity to further the interests of the business is dropping away, and others are being taken on.

No matter how good times are, this sorting continues, only if times are hard and work is scarce, this sorting is done finer. But out and forever out, the incompetent and unworthy go.



It is the survival of the fittest. Self-interest and group survival prompt every entrepreneur to keep the best, those who can carry a message to Garcia.

I know one genuinely talented man who hasn't got the ability to run a business of his own, and yet is worthless to anyone else, because he carries around a constant, insane suspicion that whoever he works for is out to take advantage of him. He can't give orders, and he won't take them. Hand him a message to carry to Garcia, and his answer would probably be, "Take it yourself."

Today this person wanders the internet looking for opportunity, the wind whistling through his empty bank account. No one who knows him dare recommend him, for he is a living picture of self-inflicted discontent.

He is immune to reason, and the only thing that can impress him is the metaphorical toe of a thick-soled No. 9 boot.

Of course I know that one so morally deformed is worthy of pity; but in your pitying, let us drop a tear, too, for the ones who are striving to carry on a great enterprise, whose working hours are not limited by the clock, and whose hair is fast turning gray through the struggle to hold the line against careless indifference, self-selected ignorance, and the heartless ingratitude which, but for their enterprise, would leave that little spot of the world both hungry and homeless.

Have I put the matter too strongly?

Possibly I have; but when all the world's compassion for the downtrodden is on display for applause, I wish to speak a word of sympathy for the one who succeeds, the one who, against great odds, has directed the efforts of self and others, and, having succeeded, finds the rewards are humbler than most imagine: food on the table and a roof overhead, same as everyone else, and a mountain of thankless responsibilities besides.

I have carried a dinner plate and worked for a 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 business owners are not predatory and domineering, any more than all poor people are virtuous.



My heart goes out to the one who does the work when the "boss" is away, as well as when the boss is at home.

And the one who, when given a letter for Garcia, quietly takes the mission, without asking any idiotic questions, and with no lurking intention of chucking it into the nearest garbage can, or of doing anything else but deliver it.

Civilization is one long anxious search for just such individuals. Anything such a one asks will be granted; this kind is so rare that no business can afford to be without them.

He or she is wanted in every city, town, and state. In every office, shop, store, factory and enterprise.

The world cries out for such; they are needed, and needed badly, the ones who can

Carry a message to Garcia.

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*So, can you name the success law this essay pays tribute to? If not, take another journey through *The 16 Laws of Success*, available free at GrowRichAudios.com.*