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## My View: Initiative still separates those who act from those who wait

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**T**here is an old essay, written more than a century ago, that still comes to mind whenever I see a task stall, a decision delayed or responsibility quietly passed along.

"A Message to Garcia" was written in 1899 by Elbert Hubbard. The premise is simple: A man is given a mission to deliver a message to someone named Garcia. The man isn't given directions, a map or detailed instructions. He isn't told how difficult the task will be. He's simply asked to do it – and he does.

That's the entire story. And that's the point.

I first encountered Hubbard's essay in the 1990s while on a business trip. A friend handed me a copy, and I read it on the flight home. It stayed with me because it captured something increasingly rare: Initiative – the willingness to take responsibility for an outcome without waiting to be guided every step of the way.



Joe Kreuz has always valued the lessons of a famous essay.

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The essay became enormously popular in its time. Millions of copies were printed. It was distributed to U.S. soldiers during both World Wars as a reminder that execution matters as much as intent. Long before buzzwords such as "ownership" and "accountability" entered the workplace, Hubbard put the idea plainly: Some people wait to be told exactly what to do, while others figure it out and act.

Over the years, I've seen that divide play out in business, organizations and everyday life. It has little to do with intelligence or credentials. It has everything to do with mindset.

Opt-Out Signal Honored

Initiative doesn't mean charging ahead blindly. It means starting. It means taking the first step and addressing problems as they arise instead of waiting for conditions to be ideal.

I was reminded of this again while watching the film "My Week with Marilyn." In a brief scene, a young assistant is asked to find the phone number of a famously elusive playwright. No instructions. Just the task. He doesn't hesitate or overanalyze. He figures it out.

Looking back, I realize this mindset was shaped early in my life. I grew up around people who didn't talk much about discipline but lived it. Work got done because it needed to get done.

Only later did I understand how formative that was. Initiative creates trust. When people know you'll follow through – without constant supervision – doors open. Not because you demand them to, but because others feel confident placing responsibility in your hands.

Today, we often confuse preparation with progress. We schedule more meetings, ask for more explanation, and delay action until everything feels resolved. Sometimes that's necessary. Often, it's just a comfortable form of hesitation.

Hubbard posed a blunt question that still applies: To which class do you belong? Are you someone who waits for perfect instructions, or someone who accepts responsibility and moves forward?

More than a century after it was written, A Message to Garcia endures because human nature hasn't changed all that much. We still wrestle with the same choice: wait, or act.

And in my experience, the people who act – even imperfectly – are the ones who quietly shape outcomes, earn trust, and move things forward.

Sometimes the most valuable skill isn't knowing all the answers. It's realizing the message won't deliver itself.

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