

Teaching Thrift: A Curriculum

Unit 3: What Is Work Ethic?

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Unit 3. What Is Work Ethic?

Enduring Understandings

- The American work ethic has deep roots in European and U.S. history and culture.
- Planning and goal-setting are essential to pursuing a profitable, sustainable, and meaningful career.
- Developing a work ethic is integral to career planning.

Content

- Definitions of work ethic (including Max Weber, Benjamin Franklin, Elbert Hubbard).
- Connections between Protestantism, democracy, capitalism, and the work ethic.
- Measuring modern work ethic by developing a survey and analyzing the results.
- Reflecting on personal work ethic.
- Setting short- and long-term goals related to improving personal work ethic.
- Applying individual reflections to future career planning.

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Essential Questions

- What are the historical roots of the American work ethic?
- Does the American work ethic persist in modern times?
- How can research methods be applied to measure modern work ethic?
- What are my positive and negative working habits?
- How can I create and implement systems to achieve goals?
- What is the difference between a job and a career?
- How can I begin to build toward a career now?

Skills

- Identify author's purpose.
- Identify main ideas and summarize a text.
- Draw conclusions based on a text.
- Compare and contrast multiple texts.
- Compose an expository essay comparing and contrasting multiple texts.
- Develop research methods appropriate to a specific question.
- Create charts and graphs based on the results of a research project.
- Analyze the results of a research project.
- Reflect on individual interests and abilities.

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- Relate careers to individual interests and abilities
- Analyze career options.
- Apply career preparation opportunities to career options.

Key Terms

industry • work ethic • goal-setting • capitalism • career planning

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Standards

Reading

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 1.1.9.A | Apply appropriate comprehension strategies to interpret and evaluate an author's implied or stated purpose using grade level text. |
| 1.1.9.D | Demonstrate comprehension of grade level text using before reading, during reading, and after reading strategies such as comparing and contrasting within and among texts, and evaluating an author's purpose and position. |
| R11.A.2.3.1 | Make inferences and/or draw conclusions based on information from text. |
| R11.A.2.3.2 | Cite evidence from text to support generalizations. |
| R11.A.2.4.1 | Identify and/or explain stated or implied main ideas and relevant supporting details from text. Note: Items may target specific paragraphs. |
| R11.A.2.5.1 | Summarize the major points, processes, and/or events of a nonfictional text as a whole. |
| R11.A.2.6.1 | Identify and/or describe the author's intended purpose of text. |
| R11.A.2.6.2 | Explain, describe, and/or analyze examples of text that support the author's intended purpose. |

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Writing

- 1.5.9.A Write with a clear focus, identifying topic, task, and audience.
- 1.5.9.B Develop content appropriate for the topic. Gather, organize, and determine validity and reliability of information. Employ the most effective format for purpose and audience. Incorporate specialized vocabulary for topic and audience. Write fully developed paragraphs that have details and information specific to the topic and relevant to the focus.
- 1.5.9.C Write with controlled and/or subtle organization. Sustain a logical order throughout the piece. Include an effective introduction and conclusion. Apply effective, subtle transitional methods within and across paragraphs.
- 1.5.9.D Write with an understanding of style using a variety of sentence structures and descriptive word choices. Create tone and voice through the use of precise language
- 1.5.9.E Revise writing to improve style, word choice, sentence variety, and subtlety of meaning after rethinking how questions of purpose, audience, and genre have been addressed.
- 1.5.9.F Use grade appropriate conventions of language when writing and editing. Spell all words correctly. Use capital letters correctly. Punctuate correctly. Use correct grammar and sentence formation.

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Math

- 2.6.11.A Design and conduct an experiment using random sampling.
- M11.E.1.1.1 Create and/or use appropriate graphical representations of data, including box-and-whisker plots, stem-and-leaf plots or scatter plots.
- M11.E.1.1.2 Analyze data and/or answer questions based on displayed data (box-and-whisker plots, stem-and-leaf plots or scatter plots).

Career Education

- 13.1.11.A Relate careers to individual interests, abilities, and aptitudes.
- 13.1.11.B Analyze career options based on personal interests, abilities, aptitudes, achievements and goals.
- 13.1.11.F Analyze the relationship between career choices and career preparation opportunities, such as, but not limited to: associate degree, baccalaureate degree, certificate/licensure, entrepreneurship, immediate part/full time employment, industry training, military training, professional degree, registered apprenticeship, tech prep, vocational rehabilitation centers.
- 13.2.11.A Apply effective speaking and listening skills used in a job interview.

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- 13.2.11.B Apply research skills in searching for a job: CareerLinks, Internet (ie O*NET), Networking, Newspapers, Professional associations, Resource books (that is Occupational Outlook Handbook, PA Career Guide).
- 13.2.11.E IDemonstrate, in the career acquisition process, the application of essential workplace skills/knowledge, such as, but not limited to: commitment, communication, dependability, health/safety, laws and regulations, personal initiative, self-advocacy, scheduling/time management, team building, technical literacy, technology.
- 13.3.11.E Evaluate time management strategies and their application to both personal and work situations.

Student Interpersonal Skills

- 16.1.12.B Demonstrate personal traits leading to positive relationships and life achievements.
- 16.1.12.D Incorporate goal setting into college, career, and other life decisions.

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Lesson 3-1: What Is Work Ethic?

Grade Level: 9-12

Timeframe: 1 class period, 45-60 minutes

Materials/Resources: n/a

Objective(s): Students will generate definitions for and associations of work ethic through discussion and self-reflection.

Quick-write/hook: “Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today.” You’ve doubtless heard this. Do you agree with it? Do you follow it? If not, would you like to and what’s stopping you? If so, why do you put so much importance on getting things done now?

Narrative

- Word association: Work. Ask students to write down the first word that comes to mind when they hear this word. Use a whip-around to have each student share one word. Divide responses into two categories: negative associations and positive associations. Have a student volunteer record this brainstorm on a T-chart on the board. After the whip-around, allow students two-three minutes to add more to each side if they are volunteering more answers.
- Ask students to define the word “ethic.” Create a working definition of the word “ethic” on the board, no more than a sentence or two, facilitating

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for accuracy, but allowing students to shape the definition using their own words and phrasing. *The American Heritage Dictionary* definition: “A set of principles of right conduct; A theory or a system of moral values.” Next, continue the brainstorm by asking students what is meant by “work ethic;” again, facilitate the formation of a student-generated definition. *The American Heritage Dictionary definition*: “A set of values based on the moral virtues of hard work and diligence.”

- Ask students, “Do you think there is a work ethic at place in this class?” Return to positive and negative associations with work. Ask students to find evidence for or against the existence of a work ethic in the class by referring to the T-chart. Have students write informally (as a write-to-learn or stop-and-jot activity) using a thesis statement such as, “This class exhibits belief in a work ethic,” or “This class denies the existence of a work ethic,” and using evidence from the T-chart to support. Teacher may use this exercise to assess student comprehension by: collecting the short writing, asking students to share their writing with the class, or asking students to share in small groups or with a partner.
- Ask students, “Do you think Americans have a work ethic?” Leading questions may include: How do you think most Americans view; or How does American media portray ... a.) the unemployed? b.) the underemployed? c.) people who struggle financially? d.) very wealthy people? e.) people who pursue post-secondary education or training? Please note that these questions may tempt students to make generalizations and/or assumptions based on mainstream culture. The purpose is not to promote stereotyping, but to engage students in the historical and cultural topic of the American work ethic. Therefore, the teacher must be vigilant about facilitating student responses to avoid prejudice or personal conflict.
- Instruct students to write a position statement summing up their opinions based on the brainstorm and discussion.

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Lesson 3-2: History of the American Work Ethic

Grade Level:	9-12
Timeframe:	1-2 class periods, 45-60 minutes each
Materials/Resources:	• Chapter Five of <i>The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</i>, by Max Weber • <i>Information for Those Who Would Remove to America</i>, by Benjamin Franklin • <i>A Message to Garcia</i>, by Elbert Hubbard
Objective(s):	Students will trace the historical roots of the American work ethic by responding to a document-based question.
Quick-write/hook:	Do you think “a little hard work never hurt anyone?” In what ways do you think a national adherence to a work ethic could be beneficial to society? To individuals? In what ways do you think it could be detrimental?

Narrative

- This requires students to analyze historical roots and scope of the American work ethic through three texts representing three distinct points of view. Each essay, in its own way, clearly and irrevocably situates the work ethic at the foundation of the American culture. Weber’s text, the definitive work on the subject, seeks to connect the Protestant religion to the rise of market economy through the work ethic. Franklin seeks to flaunt the virtue of

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his new nation to European aristocrats. Hubbard's essay scolds the lack of individual diligence he sees as a product of the emergence of the culture of mass production. After reading and comparing the three essays, students should be able to find the continuity of the association of the United States with a hard working middle class. Students should also be able to define the American work ethic; to explain how the value of this ethic is applied by Franklin and Hubbard, each for his own purpose, at two different points in history; to identify those purposes; and to find the differences in each man's perception.

- This assignment should be scaffolded according to the students' individualized needs. For example, A.P. U.S. History teachers may use the assignment as a single class-period writing practice, followed by an in-depth Socratic discussion. Teachers of younger or struggling students may employ a jigsaw, guided reading, or writing frame for this lesson.
- Students will read the texts, or excerpts from the texts, and write a complete response to the following question: How does the Protestant work ethic as described by Max Weber redefine and assert itself as the American work ethic described by Franklin and Hubbard?

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Lesson 3-3: Contemporary Work Ethic

Grade Level:	9-12
Timeframe:	2-3 class period, 45-60 minutes each
Materials/Resources:	Two short videos, linked below
Objective(s):	Students will create criteria for evaluating the modern work ethic by generating questions for a survey.
Quick-write/hook:	Where do you see the work ethic in your life? In your friends or peers? Where do you see a failure of initiative in your life? In your friends or peers?

Narrative

- Ask students if the American work ethic still exists. Allow for a few moments of discussion. Encourage students to use personal anecdotes or cultural references as evidence.
- Show video clip of Will Smith talking about work ethic. The link is 10 minutes long, so use discretion on how long students can watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2k74r1aoMc0>
- Optionally, show the 5-minute video of Ashton Kutcher's Teen Choice Award speech (note that Kutcher uses the word "sexy" to describe intelligence): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FNXwKGZHmDc>
- Students should summarize the message promoted by Will Smith, find similarities between his message and the message in the historical texts from Lesson 3.2, and speculate whether Smith's message is ordinary or

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extraordinary in today's society. This can be achieved through a formal writing assignment or an informal class discussion.

- Ask students how we can assess, as a group, whether the work ethic exists in modern America. Responses will likely include “research” and “the internet.” If no student generates the idea to conduct research through a questionnaire and create a local study on work ethic, lead students toward that suggestion or state it outright.
- Arrange students in groups of 3-4. Each group designates a facilitator and a note-taker. Allow time for each group to brainstorm and compile a list of five questions students believe can assess accurately an individual's relationship to work. Instruct students to refer to the pop-star videos from the start of the lesson, as well as the historical documents from the previous lesson. Questions should be answerable on a numerical scale. (Ex: Set up a value system in which 1=“strongly disagree” and 5=“strongly agree” and phrase questions as statements, or phrase questions as “on a scale of 1 to 10,” etc.)
- Collect and compile student lists. At the next lesson, students will reform groups. The facilitator of each group should distribute a copy of the list of all the questions compiled from the previous day's group work. Have students discuss and evaluate each question. Each group should rank the questions from the most to the least helpful in determining a subject's work ethic. Depending on the number of groups and the in groups' ratings, use this process to narrow the questions down to 10.
- Options for the distribution of survey: Depending on class size and climate of school and neighborhood and time available, teacher may choose to conduct the survey strictly within the class or across the community. Whichever option, the teacher must make sure the surveys are conducted anonymously and following whatever guidelines the school or school district may have in place for such activities. For the smallest, most informal study, students may use the survey internally to gauge the work ethic of their particular class. For a larger sampling, students can distribute survey

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to other classes to compile more data. For advanced classes students can distribute the survey to faculty, staff, and relatives as well. Finally, depending on available technology and resources, survey may be copied and distributed on paper, or by using an online resource such as Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com).

- Students will work in their collaborative small groups to compile results, draw conclusions, and illustrate those conclusions. They will choose an area of focus, or the teacher will assign each group with an area of focus, and find the average answers from the body of responses. Then they may create bar graphs, line graphs, pie charts, or other graphic representations.

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Lesson 3-4: Personal Work Ethic

Grade Level:	9-12
Timeframe:	2-3 class periods, 45-60 minutes each
Materials/Resources:	n/a
Objective(s):	Students will reflect on personal work ethic and create personal goals for improvement.
Quick-write/hook:	What is your personal relationship to work? What enjoyment or rewards do you get from hard work? What are your strengths and weaknesses? What kinds of feelings and associations do you derive from thinking about work?

Narrative

- Have students evaluate themselves according to the survey created in Lesson 3.3. Students should have the freedom to work privately on this. Tell them specifically that they will not be asked to share any negative personal results with the class and assure them the results will remain private.
- Next, tell them to compare their personal results with the data retrieved from the survey (according to the results generated in Lesson 3.3).
- Each student should identify one area as a personal strength and another as a personal weakness.
- Ask for volunteers to share out their strengths with the class, then begin to pair or group students based on strengths in common. For example, if

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more than one student identifies “punctuality” as a strength, they can be given the option or directive to work together on the next assignment.

- Once students have identified their personal strengths, tell them to imagine instructing the class on this strength. Ask them to create a series of instructions on how to achieve that strength and prepare to present it to the class as a mini-lesson. In this assignment, students may work individually or in pairs, but larger groups are not recommended, primarily for brevity. Encourage students to be creative and to have fun with the assignment, to be as simple as possible in their instruction.
- As students/pairs are presenting, the rest of the class should be taking notes in order to give feedback, ask questions, and create action plans for themselves.
- When all the presentations are complete, each student should turn individually to his or her identified weakness. Using ideas obtained by watching peers present on their strengths, students should create an action plan on how they will improve on their work weaknesses. Each student should set a goal and a measurable indicator to gauge if the action plan is effective over the course of a set period of time (to be determined by teacher. Teacher must revisit these goals by preparing self-evaluations or holding brief individual consultations with students at the end of the determined set period of time for improvement).
- Discuss how to measure each individual’s work ethic and how a class measurement system could look. Students will help set up the system and determine “point” values. Work toward giving the students a reward when they achieve a certain amount of “points.” Example: Students in a child-care class are required to wear uniforms when they work with children in the lab setting, provided by the school. A reward could be the privilege of wearing jeans during lab time with their uniform shirt. The teacher should set the reward to be engaging and relevant to the students.

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- At the end of the set period of time, tally points and award rewards the first week of the next month.

Notes:

I have chosen to use *The American Heritage Dictionary* to define “ethic” and “work ethic” because the first part of this lesson explores the American meaning and history of the Protestant work ethic. While the *Oxford English Dictionary* is the standard, it is rooted in English, rather than American, tradition and usage. *The American Heritage Dictionary* records the meanings of words not only by strict denotation, but also by the connotation developed by usage in American texts over time. This usage is central to the study of the American work ethic.

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Readings, Lesson 3.2

Wealth as such is a great danger; its temptations never end, and its pursuit is not only senseless as compared with the dominating importance of the Kingdom of God, but it is morally suspect. ... Examples of the condemnation of the pursuit of money and goods may be gathered without end from Puritan writings, and may be contrasted with the late medieval ethical literature, which was much more open-minded on this point. ...

The real moral objection is to relaxation in the security of possession, the enjoyment of wealth with the consequence of idleness and the temptations of the flesh, above all of distraction from the pursuits of a righteous life. In fact, it is only because possession involves this danger of relaxation that it is objectionable at all. For the saints' everlasting rest is in the next world; on earth man must, to be certain of his state of grace, "do the works of him who sent him, as long as it is yet day". Not leisure and enjoyment, but only activity services to increase the glory of God, according to the definite manifestations of His will.

Waste of time is thus the first and in principle the deadliest of sins. The span of human life is infinitely short and precious to make sure of one's own election. Loss of time through sociability, idle talk, luxury, even more sleep than is necessary for health, six to at most eight hours, is worthy of absolute moral condemnation. It does not yet hold, with Franklin, that time is money, but the proposition is true in a certain spiritual sense. It is infinitely valuable because every hour lost is lost to labour for the glory of God. Thus inactive contemplation is also valueless, or even directly reprehensible if it is at the expense of one's daily work. For it is less pleasing to God than the active performance of His will in a calling. Besides, Sunday is provided for that, and according to Baxter, it is always those who are not diligent in their callings who have no time for God when the occasion demands it.

Accordingly, Baxter's principal work is dominated by the continually repeated, often almost passionate preaching of hard, continuous bodily or mental labour. It is due to a combination of two different motives. Labour is, on the

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one hand, an approved ascetic technique, as it always has been in the Western Church, ...

Here the difference from the medieval view-point becomes quite evident. Thomas Aquinas also gave an interpretation of that statement of St. Paul. But for him labor is only necessary *naturali ratione* for the maintenance of individual and community. Where this end is achieved, the precept ceases to have any meaning. Moreover, it holds only for the race, not for every individual. It does not apply to anyone who can live without labour on his possessions, and of course contemplation, as a spiritual form of action in the Kingdom of God, takes precedence over the commandment in its literal sense. Moreover, for the popular theology of the time, the highest form of monastic productivity lay in the increase of *Thesaurus ecclesiae* through prayer and chant.

Now only do these exceptions to the duty to labour naturally no longer hold for Baxter, but he holds most emphatically that wealth does not exempt anyone from the unconditional command. Even the wealthy shall not eat without working, for even though they do not need to labour to support their own needs, there is God's commandment which they, like the poor, must obey. For everyone without exception God's Providence has prepared a calling, which he should profess and in which he should labour. And this calling is not, as it was for the Lutheran, a fate to which he must submit and which he must make the best of, but God's commandment to the individual to work for the divine glory. This seemingly subtle difference had far-reaching psychological consequences, and became connected with a further development of the providential interpretation of the economic order which had begun in scholasticism. ...

It is true that the usefulness of a calling, and thus its favour in the sight of God, is measured primarily in moral terms, and thus in terms of the importance of the goods produced in it for the community. But a further, and, above all, in practice the most important, criterion is found in private profitableness. For if that God, whose hand the Puritan sees in all the occurrences of life, shows one of His elect a chance of profit, he must do it with a purpose. Hence the faithful Christian must follow the call by taking advantage of the opportunity. "If God show you a

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way in which you may lawfully get more than in another way (without wrong to your soul or to any other), if you refuse this, and choose the less gainful way, you cross one of the ends of your calling, and you refuse to be God's steward, and to accept His gifts and use them for Him when He requireth it: you may labour to be rich for God, though not for the flesh and sin."

Wealth is thus bad ethically only in so far as it is a temptation to idleness and sinful enjoyment of life, and its acquisition is bad only when it is with the purpose of later living merrily and without care. But as a performance of duty in a calling it is not only morally permissible, but actually enjoined. The parable of the servant who was rejected because he did not increase the talent which was entrusted to him seemed to say so directly. To wish to be poor was, it was often argued, the same as wishing to be unhealthy; it is objectionable as a glorification of works and derogatory to the glory of God. Especially begging, on the part of one able to work, is not only the sin of slothfulness, but a violation of the duty of brotherly love according to the Apostle's own word.

—Max Weber, 1904, 1905. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Talcott Parson translation, 1930), p156-163.

<https://archive.org/details/protestantethics00webe>

He finds it is imagined by Numbers, that the Inhabitants of North-America are rich, capable of rewarding, and dispos'd to reward all sorts of Ingenuity; that they are at the same time ignorant of all the Sciences; & consequently that stranger possessing Talents in the Belles-Lettres, fine Arts, &c. must be highly esteemed, and so well paid as to become easily rich themselves; that there are also abundance of profitable Offices to be disposed of, which the Natives are not qualified to fill; and that having few Persons of Family among them, Strangers of Birth must be greatly respected, and of course easily obtain the best of those Offices, which will make all their Fortunes that the Governments too, to encourage Emigrations from Europe, not only pay the Expence of personal Transportation, but give Lands gratis to Strangers, with Negroes to work

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for them, Utensils of Husbandry, & Stocks of Cattle. These are all wild Imaginations; and those who go to America with Expectations founded upon them, will surely find themselves disappointed.

The Truth is, that tho' there are in that Country few People so miserable as the Poor of Europe, there are also very few that in Europe would be called rich: it is rather a general happy Mediocrity that prevails. There are few great Proprietors of the Soil, and few Tenants; most People cultivate their own Lands, or follow some Handicraft or Merchandise; very few rich enough to live idly upon their Rents or Incomes; or to pay the high Prices given in Europe for Paintings, Statues, Architecture and the other Works of Art that are more curious than useful. ...

These Ideas prevailing more or less in all the United States, it cannot be worth any Man's while, who has a means of Living at home, to expatriate himself in hopes of obtaining a profitable civil Office in America; and as to military Offices, they are at an End with the War; the Armies being disbanded. Much less is it advisable for a Person to go thither who has no other Quality to recommend him but his Birth. In Europe it has indeed its Value, but it is a Commodity that cannot be carried to a worse Market than that of America, where People do not inquire concerning a Stranger, *What is he?* but, *What can he do?* If he has any useful Art, he is welcome; and if he exercises it and behaves well, he will be respected by all that know him; but a mere Man of Quality, who on that Account wants to live upon the Public, by some Office or Salary, will be despis'd and disregarded. The Husbandman is in honor there, & even the Mechanic, because their Employments are useful.

—Benjamin Franklin, 1782, *Information for Those who would Remove to America*, excerpt.

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

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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 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.

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.

—Elbert Hubbard, 1899. *A Message to Garcia*, excerpt.