



The WHY Cafe

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Author's Bio: John p. Strelecky is an expert in helping people improve their lives. He has impacted millions through his writings, presentations, and appearances on television and radio. He has consulted for Fortune 500 companies and lectured at the university level. His other books include *The Big Five For Life* and *Life Safari*.

Author's big thought: Sometimes when you least expect it, and perhaps most need it, you find yourself in a new place, with new people, and you learn new things. That happened to John (our hero) one night on a dark, lonely stretch of road. In retrospect, his situation at that moment was symbolic of his life at that time. Just as he was lost on the road, he was lost in life as well, unsure of exactly where he was going or why he was moving in that direction. That night in the *Why Café* changed his life. The questions he was exposed to resulted in thoughts and discoveries beyond anything he had imagined before then.

The Cast of Characters:

John: Our hero on the path of self discovery

Casey; Mischievous waitress and guide

Anne: Former advertising Executive

Mike: Café owner and cook, fulfilling his PFE

The Story:

It was when the needle on the fuel gauge just started to slip below the red line with the E on top that John saw the light. It was a single, white streetlight, shining brightly in a location so remote that it was in the middle of the middle of nowhere. At the light, was a small, white, rectangular building with the name **The Why Café** spelled out in light-blue on a neon sign. On the inside the café had the feel of an old diner. It felt very comfortable, the kind of place inhere you could sit and talk for a long time with friends.

John picked up the menu from the table and read the front cover. “Welcome to The Why Café” was on the top half of the page. Underneath, in small black letters, it said, “Prior to ordering, please consult with our wait staff about what your time here could mean.”

The surprise came when he turned the menu over. On the back cover were three questions under the heading **Items to Ponder While You Wait**: “Why are you here? Do you fear death? Are you fulfilled?”

The first Question: Why are you here?

If you change the question to no longer be something you ask someone else, but instead you change it to something you ask yourself, you will no longer be the same person. He looked down at the menu. To his surprise, the question was no longer “Why are you here?” It now read, “Why am I here?” By now John was totally confused with what was going on and not all that sure he wanted to stick around and figure it out.

“Why am I here?” is not a question to be taken lightly. A glance at it is one thing, but when you go beyond glancing and actually see it, and then ask it of yourself— your world changes. “That sounds drastic, and that’s why they put the message on the front of the menu” Casey told him.

Once you ask the question, seeking the answer will become part of your being. It’s a little like a gateway. Once you open it up, it beckons you. Many people think they are “fine”. But some seek something more fulfilling than fine, something greater.

John knew that if he were totally honest with himself, he would admit that for years he had wondered if there was more to life than what he already knew about. It wasn’t that life was bad. Sure it was frustrating at times, particularly lately, but he had a decent job and good friends. Life was fine, and sometimes, good. Still, in the back of his mind was this feeling that he couldn’t quite explain.

John realized that asking the question would open up a gateway of sorts. The person’s mind, soul, or however you view it, will want to seek out the answer. The question will be at the forefront of that person’s existence until they figure it out.

Casey advised: “Once someone finds the answer, an equally powerful force emerges. You see, once a person knows why they are here, why they exist, their reason for being alive, they’ll want to fulfill that reason. It will become emotionally and even physically more difficult to not fulfill that reason.” People face this question at all different times. Some sort it out when they’re little kids, some when they are older, and other people never do. As far as *how* to find the answer, there isn’t just one method that works for every person. We all approach life in our own way.

The frustration that was overwhelming John when he came into the café had almost entirely disappeared. He had gotten so focused on the “Why are you here?” question and the ensuing discussions, that everything else had become secondary. The presence of a great-tasting omelet hadn’t hurt, either.

John next wondered “What do they do with that knowledge?” Casey said “They can do whatever they want with it. They uncovered it, and it belongs to them. They have ultimate and total say about what to do.” It sounded so basic that it was almost too basic to be right. Do whatever you want that fulfills the reason why you are here.

Much of John’s life had been spent making decisions in response to other reasons, like family advice, cultural pressures, and people’s opinions. This was something different. “So when a person knows the reason they are here, they have identified their Purpose for Existing. We call it PFE for short. Our most fulfilled customers, said Casey, are the ones who know their PFE, and try all the activities they believe will fulfill it.”

“A person learns about all the things that could fulfill their Purpose for Existing by exploring and getting exposure to a lot of things related to their PFE.” We are all limited by our current experiences and knowledge. The important word here is ‘current.’ More than ever before in the history of the world as we know it, we each have the chance to gain exposure to information, people, cultures, and experiences from all over the world. John thought, “Without knowing exactly why I am here, and what I want to do, I just kind of do the things most people are doing.”

Once someone knows why they are here - they know their PFE - then they can spend their time doing things that fulfill it. People who don’t know their PFE also spend their time in lots of things. The things they spend their time on are things that don’t help them fill their PFE. When people aren’t in tune with what they want to do, they can waste their energy on lots of things. When opportunities come up to do what they want, they might not have the strength or time to spend on them.

John did an interesting calculation and discovered that if from the time John graduated college until the time he reaches seventy-five years old, he spent twenty minutes per day opening and looking at mail he really didn’t care about, he would end up spending almost an entire year of his life on junk mail.

Mike offered this wisdom: “I came to an important realization for me. Retirement was this time in the future when I would have enough money to do what I wanted. I would be free to participate in the activities I liked, and could spend every day in a way that fulfilled me. Then one evening, after a particularly unfulfilling day at work, I came to the conclusion that there had to be a better way. I realized that for me, every day is an opportunity to do whatever I want. Every day I have a chance to fulfill the answer to the question that you glimpsed on the back of the menu. I don’t need to wait until retirement.”

John then asked: “How is it that we spend so much of our time preparing for when we can do what we want, instead of just doing what we want right now?”

Anne provided this wisdom in answer to John’s question:

Advertisers have long known that if you effectively target people’s fears and their desire to be fulfilled, you can motivate them to do things. If you can play to the right fear, or to the right desire, you can get them to buy specific goods and use particular services. The purpose of those messages is to get you to

believe they will bring meaning to your life, eating that ice cream will translate into happiness, having this diamond will mean contentment. Not only will those products enable you to be fulfilled if you have them, but they can keep you from being fulfilled if you don't have them. If we aren't careful, we buy into the mass of marketing messages we are exposed to every day and end up believing that the answer to happiness and fulfillment lies in a product or service. Eventually that can result in us putting ourselves in a financial position where we feel we have to keep doing something that isn't what we want to do.

We get a job. It may not be our ideal job, and the time we spend at work may not be exactly how we want to spend the hours of our life, but we take the job so that we can pay for the things we bought. We tell ourselves it is temporary. Soon we will be doing something else, something that is more in line with what we really want to do. Because the job isn't fulfilling, and because we are spending so much time at our job, we feel more and more unfulfilled.

To offset the fact that we aren't spending every day doing what we want, we purchase some more things, hoping that in some small way the advertising messages are true. We hope those things will bring the fulfillment that our daily work life does not. Unfortunately, the more we purchase, the more bills we have, and therefore the more time we need to spend at work so we can pay for everything. Since time at our job is not really the way we want to spend our life, more time at work results in more feelings of un-fulfillment because now we have even less time for the things we want to do. The end result is that people keep working for a long time, doing things that don't necessarily fulfill their PFE. Meanwhile, they keep looking out into the future for when they don't have to work anymore, and then they can do what they want

The challenge, she said, is to realize that something is fulfilling because we individually determine it is fulfilling, not because someone else tells us it is. To resolve this Anne started slowly, taking a little more time for herself each week. She stopped treating herself to 'things' as compensation for working so hard and instead started treating herself by doing what she wanted to do. Eventually, the one hour became two, and that progressed to three, and before she knew it, she was totally focused on doing things she wanted to do, things that fulfilled her answer to 'why am I here.'

The second question: Do you fear death?

As a matter of fact it is one of the most common fears people have. Subconsciously, people know that with the passage of each day, they are one day closer to not having a chance to do the things they want in life. So they fear the day that exists sometime in the future when they will no longer have the chance. They fear the day they will die. You may have thought of it before, but at that time you weren't ready to listen to or act on those thoughts. It isn't enough to know the concept. The point is to actually do the things you want to do.

The questions didn't seem as odd compared to when John first read them off the menu. In fact, they were much more important now.

The third question: Are you fulfilled?

John thought: “Until you go beyond merely knowing why you are here, and actually start working towards it, I don’t think you can be fulfilled. What happens if I ask myself why I am here, and identify what I want to do, and then I don’t know how to do those things, or can’t get a job doing them? What will I do for money? How can I support myself, and how can I save for retirement? What if I’m not good at whatever these new things might be? Or what if they’re things other people will laugh at or not respect?”

Casey responded with her wisdom: Have you ever met someone who was completely passionate about what they did every day? They seemed to be spending their time on something they truly enjoyed? They are pretty positive and upbeat people,” she said. “They probably don’t need to get away from it all to get ‘recharged.’ ” Why wait to do what you want, when you can do it right now.”

There is a best possible scenario. A person could get paid a lot of money for doing the things they want to do and in that way fulfill why they are here. A person’s definition of ‘a lot money’ varies based on how much they’re living a life they want. John figured that if he knew why he were here, and was doing the things he determined would fulfill his reason for being here, then he would probably be less concerned about money than he was.

The people who truly enjoy what they’re doing are the ones spending their time on something that, at least as far as he someone could tell, is in line with what they have determined will fulfill their PFE. People who know their PFE, and are doing whatever they want to fulfill it, do seem very lucky. Unexpected, seemingly random things happen for them just when they need it most. They know it comes into play when they are fulfilling their Purpose For Existing, and they just see it as part of the way things work.” “Some people have said that,” explained Casey. “Others see it as part of the natural flow of the universe, or a higher power at work. Still others just view it as good luck. But they all agree it’s there and is a factor in what they do.”

Suppose you’re letting people know about your PFE. If you talk to ten people, and they each talk to ten and it keeps going, before long you have a whole bunch of people who potentially will help you. You can’t help but get caught up in their passion and enthusiasm for what they are doing. You just feel like you want to help them. If you couldn’t help, but you knew others who might be able to, would you contact them?” They seem so on the right path that you just want to help.

Those people seem to have some common characteristics in that they know why they are here, they’ve figured out what things they want to do to fulfill that reason, and they’re completely confident they’ll be able to do those things. And when they try to do them, events occur to help them succeed.

For many people, it’s as simple as never having been exposed to the concept of a Purpose For Existing. Others understand the concept, but they aren’t sure they have a PFE. Then, there are some people who, because of their upbringing, environment, or perhaps religious beliefs, don’t believe they have the right to try and fulfill their PFE. Even people who feel they have a Purpose For Existence and believe they have the right to fulfill it, sometimes don’t believe fulfilling it is as simple as knowing they can, and then doing what they want.

Once someone knows their PFE, they get to do and become whatever they want. They don't need someone else's permission or consent. No one can keep a person from, or enable them to achieve and do all that they want in life. We each control our own destiny.

How you go about finding the answer: Mike's wisdom:

"For some people, they ask the question, and they want to know the answer but they want someone or something else to be responsible for bringing them the answer. The thing is, just as we have free will to decide what we want to do once we know the answer, we are also the ones in control of finding the answer. People do that in different ways. Some spend time meditating on why they are here. Others listen to their favorite music and note where their mind takes them. Many people take time alone in a natural environment, and still others talk with friends and strangers about it. Some people are guided to their answer through ideas and stories they read in books. The key thing to remember is, we are the only ones who can determine what our own answer is.

Some find that when they experience new things and learn new ideas, certain ones resonate with them. Many people actually experience a physical reaction. They get chills, a tremor up their spine, or cry tears of joy when they come across something they really relate to. For others, a sense of knowing comes over them. Those can be clues to help people identify their answer to why they are here.

There is no single answer for everyone, but putting yourself in a position where you can focus on the question is one possible way. Getting exposure to different experiences and ideas, and watching for personal reactions to them, is something else that could be used.

Life is a great story, John. It's just that some people don't realize they are the author, and they can write it however they want."

Epilogue:

After his night in the café, things changed for John. They weren't lightning-bolt-from-the-sky-type changes in terms of how they presented themselves, but they were at least that dynamic in their eventual impact on his life.

He started with a small amount of time each day that he dedicated to doing things he liked, Then he tried to take advantage of the opportunities Casey talked about and sought chances to learn about and try new things. This helped to expand his universe of possible reasons for why he is here, so it was not as small as it had been when he started his journey.

Eventually, John's PFE, and the ways he wanted to fulfill it became clear. Ironically, that was when he faced the most difficult challenge of all. When you weigh two choices, and one is living a life that fulfills your Purpose For existing, and the other is just living, you would think the decision is simple. It isn't.

For him, the knowledge that "you can't fear not having the chance to do something if you are doing it or have already done it" helped him push open that gate. It is now one of the philosophies by which he lives his life. It is in the face of our seeming insignificance that we find meaning. If he has any regret

about making the changes he's made in his life, it is only that he didn't make them sooner. He guessed he just wasn't ready before that night in the café.

Recommendation: This book is inspiring and life-transforming. Take the questions seriously and you too may make some unexpected changes in your life.

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About the reviewer: Frumi Rachel Barr, MBA, PhD

Many CEO's find themselves asking "What now?" to sensitive situations that only an experienced former CEO can understand. Frumi is brought in to solve problems and often remains to work with you, as your confidante and secret weapon. She has an uncanny knack of getting to the heart of your corporate climate and maximizing your team's performance, profitability and sustainability.

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