

Ten Tips for Living the Life of Your Dreams

by John P. Strelecky- Best-selling Author of *The Why Café*

The first book I wrote is called *The Why Café* – also known as *The Why Are You Here Café*. It is a fiction story about a man who wanders into an all night café and is surprised to find three questions on the menu. Why Are You Here? Do You Fear Death? Are You Fulfilled?

Shortly after the book came out I was asked to give an inspirational speech, and so I came up with the following ten tips.

In response to requests from people who had heard the speech, I created this article, which gives the text of the ten tips.

I am not so arrogant now, nor was I when I wrote the speech, to think that I have the answer to how anyone except for me should live their life. I do know though, that there are certain things I've learned that help me think about life in a different way. There are things that I wish I had learned

earlier in life, things that I reflect on often and that continually give me a boost and help me on my journey to achieve the life of my dreams.

My hope is that in sharing those things with you, they will in some way assist you on your journey to live the life of your dreams.

So with that as a prelude, I present to you, *Ten Tips for Living the Life of Your Dreams*.

1. Know your Purpose For Existing (PFE), or at least be looking

Most lists start from the bottom and work their way up so that the most impactful one is at the end. You can't do that with this list, because the first one is too important. All else flows from it.

Your Purpose For Existing is exactly what it says. It is the reason you exist, the reason you are alive. It is the answer to the

question I asked you at the start of this article. Why Are You Here?

Your PFE is like your own personal compass for life. Should you go to New York City and become a commodities trader? Go back to your PFE. Why are you here? Should you travel the world as a peace corp. volunteer? Go back to your PFE. Why are you here? Should you stay in a relationship you've been questioning? Go back to your PFE. Why are you here?

In addition to taking a great deal of the stress out of decision making, it also takes a lot of the anxiety out of everyday life. You don't have to justify to yourself or anyone else why you do what you do. You know the answer. You meet someone and they say, "Hi, what do you do?" You respond, "Oh, I teach yoga," or "I'm an insurance salesperson," or "I'm a chiropractor." "Interesting," they say, "what made you go into that line of work." "Well, it helps fulfill my Purpose For Existing," you respond. Wow! That is a powerful statement. You do what you do because it helps you fulfill the exact reason you exist. It doesn't get much simpler, or more powerful than that.

Know your Purpose For Existing (PFE) or at least be looking.

2. Fear is a terrible thing, don't let it control your life.

Someone once told me a great quote about trying something new. He said he had been battling with fear for a long time until one day his friend told him, "Listen, realistically what's the worst that could happen." I think that is great comment to remember. We are often paralyzed into non-action by the concern that something drastic might happen. But the reality is that almost any decision we make or action we take can be changed if we don't like the outcome.

We can almost always go back to whatever it was we were doing before we tried something new. Furthermore, what are the odds that the "worst thing" will happen? It probably isn't likely at all, and yet that remote chance keeps us from doing the things we want to do.

I'll share with you a personal story. Fear is something I used to have an ongoing battle with. I feared failure, and I feared success. Now that puts you in a pretty interesting predicament. You don't try things that you aren't totally sure you will succeed at, and the things you do try, you stop just before you are going to be fantastically successful. When you let something like that control your life, you end up missing out on most of the things you want to do.

My major "Aha" moment which enabled me to get past my fears, came one day when I suddenly

realized that there are very few things that have not already been done by at least one, and probably thousands of people. Certainly everything I was attempting, other people had already tried and succeeded at. Well heck, I thought. If they could do it, so can I.

In 2002 my wife and I backpacked around the world. Using a combination of bus, train, horse, plane, car, elephant, bicycle, scooter, pick-up truck, camel and an assortment of other transport including our own two feet, we covered over 70,000 miles, which is almost three times the circumference of the earth.

This was something that I had wanted to do since 1997. When you don't know anything about embarking on such a journey it seems like a very daunting task. How will I find places to stay in other countries? What happens when I can't communicate with anyone because we don't speak the same language? What should I do if I get sick, or if I'm attacked by muggers? How can I be sure the plane won't crash?

In the past, these concerns and thousands of others that I would have come up with, would have been more than enough to keep me from going. But the reality is that tens of thousands of other people have traveled the world. They are people just like me, and they figured out a way to get around. So

I thought to myself, if they could do it so can I.

It is likely that whatever you are trying to accomplish in life, someone, at some point in history, at some spot in the world, did it, and proved it could be done. If they could do it, so can you.

Don't let fear control your life.

3. Either we can live as a speck of meaningless existence, or we can live a life of meaning

Have you ever been somewhere on a very clear night when you could get a great look at the stars? You were in a place nice and dark without any local lights distracting your eyes. How many stars do you think you could see with your naked eye when you looked across the whole sky? It seemed like millions I bet. The sky seemed just packed with stars. Well, the reality is that the immense quantity of stars you see on a totally clear night when there is no outside light is actually about 3,000.

To put that number in perspective, keep in mind that in our galaxy alone, there are 100 billion stars. 100 BILLION STARS!!! Now, our star, which is the sun, has 9 planets and 54 moons that rotate around it. Using our star as a proxy, that means there are 6.3 TRILLION stars, planets, and moons floating around

in our galaxy. So what you see on a perfectly clear night, that immense amount of stars and space, is around .00000005% of everything in our galaxy. Amazing isn't it. Now consider this. That is just our galaxy. Do you know how many galaxies there are? Scientists estimate there are over 100 billion of them!

So here we are, living on a single planet that is just one of the very large number you get when you multiply 6.3 trillion times 100 billion. That can make you feel pretty small, especially when you consider that each of us is just one of almost 6.3 billion people that live on this planet.

So with all that as perspective, how important are our individual lives in comparison to the entire universe? It is pretty easy to see how someone could think that they are just a speck of meaningless existence. Certainly we are all just specks in the big picture. But suppose we aren't meaningless. Suppose there is a specific purpose that each of us is here, a reason that we exist right now that goes beyond just sperm met egg and nine months later out popped a little you or me.

I believe there is a reason. I believe we each have a specific Purpose For Existing, or PFE as I like to refer to it. My suggestions is, find that purpose. Fulfill that purpose.

I've had people say to me, "But what if you are wrong?" "What if I think I have a PFE, and I live my life like I do, but I really am just a speck of meaningless existence?" My reply to that is always the same. If we find what we think is our very purpose for being alive, our purpose for existing, and we live a life to fulfill it, then by default, we will have given meaning to our life. What has meaning, can no longer be meaningless.

4. Realize something is fulfilling because we decide it is fulfilling, not because someone else tells us it is.

In 1997 I graduated from Northwestern University's Kellogg Graduate School of Management. It was ranked #1 in the business school rankings when I went there, and is ranked #1 now. The school is known for marketing, and that was one of my focuses. When I left Kellogg I spent five years helping companies figure out ways to make more money by selling more of their products and services.

Why am I telling you this? Is this simply shameless self promotion? No, actually I save the shameless self promotion for my book now. I'm telling you this because I see a disturbing trend in this country and I want you to know that I'm not some crackpot, but that I actually have a basis

upon which to make the following statement. There are a lot of people out there trying to get you to buy things, and they will tell you almost anything to get you to do it.

Do you know how much money was spent on advertising in the United States last year? The answer is a staggering \$124 billion dollars. That's right, \$124 billion dollars. The goal of those expenditures is to get you and me to buy things, and advertisers are getting more and more savvy about how to do it.

If you haven't read it, see if you can track down the September 2003 edition of Forbes magazine. Keep in mind, this is Forbes, a respected magazine with a focus on top business professionals. The title of the article that is profiled on the cover is "In search of the buy button". The article explains how marketers are using brain response measurement technology originally developed for the medical profession, to create advertisements that are more enticing to customers.

For example, they have learned that memory and emotion are significant factors in whether or not a customer has brand loyalty to a product. So they review brain responses of test subjects who are shown advertisements, to see if a particular advertisement invokes a reaction from the emotion center or memory center of the test subject's brain. That way they can tell if

the advertisement will stimulate long term brand loyalty for a particular product.

Among the companies looking into using this are General Motors, Ford of Europe, and the one that I find particularly interesting is Camelot, the United Kingdom's national lottery operator.

Can't you just see that? Someone is walking down the street, they pass a billboard, and suddenly have this tremendous, compelling, yet unexplainable urge to buy lottery tickets.

Are we to that point yet? No, I don't think so. Will we get to that point? I don't know. The point is, marketers and marketing technology are, and will continue to, make it harder and harder to sift through all the noise so that we can form our own perspective on things.

Now that doesn't mean we should refuse to go out and buy things, and it doesn't mean we should all go live in log cabins somewhere. As a matter of fact, purchasing things can be a fascinating part of the life experience.

The challenge is to realize something is fulfilling not because someone tells us it is, but because we individually determine it is fulfilling. Does love really come in the form of diamond earrings, which say "You love her and would marry her all over again"? Does self worth and empowerment truly

lie in owning a particular automobile? I personally don't think so in either case, but don't listen to me anymore than you would listen to the advertisement. You decide.

Realize something is fulfilling because we determine it is fulfilling, not because someone else tells us it is.

5. Be thankful for and leverage the advantages that come from living in this country

We have some amazing opportunities at our fingertips simply because we live in this country. Now, I don't know about you, but all I did to get these opportunities was pop out of the womb in what turned out to be a very fortuitous spot.

Do you know how much the average college graduate in Myanmar (formerly Burma) makes? They make 10,000 Kat per month. That is about \$12.00 U.S. How about the average college graduate in China? How much do you think they make per month? That number is 1500 Yuen, which is just under \$200.00 U.S.

Now salaries of that magnitude are enough for those people to function in their country's respective economies. In all likelihood though, those people will never be able to travel and see the world. They just can't afford it.

But we can. We have the financial benefit of a strong currency compared to the majority of the world.

In South Africa, almost 2/3rds of the population lives a life of poverty. The people live in townships that often consist of small shacks which lack the most basic functions like running water and heat. Do you know why? Those people were born into a society where the color of their skin dictated whether they had any freedoms.

South Africa is now a democracy, and has been for the last ten years, and the situation there is improving every day. But you can't just turn a switch and suddenly 30 million people have the education, training, and work experience to make a decent living. Even if you could, there isn't an economy in place to support a more educated workforce of that magnitude.

But we already have those opportunities. In this country we can get an education, and we can go out and get a decent paying job. We think unemployment is really getting bad when it hits 6%. In places in South Africa it is over 40%.

As a country we have our fair share of problems. When you get outside the borders and travel to other places, you see things that make the U.S. look like paradise. We have freedom. We can say

what we want, buy what we want, become what we want, travel where we want, and for the most part the only thing we did to get all this, is pop out of the womb in the right geographical area. We shouldn't take it for granted.

Instead, we should appreciate the opportunity and leverage it to live the life of our dreams.

Be thankful for, and leverage the advantages that come from living in this country.

6. Look at the little picture, but with a big perspective

People often say, look at the big picture. I say look at the little picture, but with a big perspective.

Do you know what life is? Life is actually a day multiplied by about 28,500. Sometimes it is less, hopefully more, but usually around 28,500. The easiest way to make sure we have a life we enjoy is to make sure that each day we do something we enjoy. I'm sure this sounds simple to you. It took me decades to figure this out.

Doing something you enjoy each day is an example of looking at the little picture. But keep in mind the big perspective, which is what is your PFE? What is it that you want out of life? Why are you here?

Here is an example of little picture and big perspective. Do you do some form of work for at least 20 minutes each weekday? Do you go to a job, work from

home, something? How about this. Do you wake up each weekday and stretch for at least 20 minutes?

Ok, different question. What is more important to you, health or money? Would you permanently trade the ability to walk up a flight of stairs in exchange for money? Would you permanently trade the ability to take a bike ride along the beach, garden, lift up a grandchild, play sports, or go fishing in exchange for money?

Then be careful about how you spend your time each day, because making the decision to head off to work 20 minutes early, or spending an extra 20 minutes at work, instead of taking 20 minutes per day to stretch, is a slow version of trading those abilities.

For a number of years I was the poster child for making that trade. I would have the best of intentions, but when the alarm would go off, I'd hit the snooze alarm three times and then finally roll out of bed with just enough time to shower, shave, dress in a suit, and hit the road.

I had it timed down to the minute. As long as I got up 28 minutes before I had to leave, I was good to go. Then I would work long hours at a client, grab a late dinner, and arrive back home or to a hotel room so tired that I would just go to bed.

But the reality is that people change jobs an average of every three years now. Our bodies however, we keep for our whole

life. Which one deserves the extra twenty minutes per day?

This concept isn't just about exercising either. The same goes for spending time with our spouse, friends, significant other, kids, grandchildren, or even complete strangers if that is what brings us joy.

We have a propensity as a society to spend all kinds of time on other things, and when we are good and tired and barely have the energy to say hello, then we go interact with those who mean the most to us, or spend time on ourselves. This is the fast track to finding yourself feeling like a complete stranger with the people who mean the most to you, and yourself.

Look at the little picture, but from a big perspective.

7. Seek out near life experiences

At the age of 28 I began to have near life experiences. Have you heard the term *near death experience*? That is when people survive a heart attack, or almost get hit by a car and they get this tremendous sense of lucidness about how short life is and how they should give some thought to how they really want to live it before they don't have a life to live.

Well at 28 I started to have those revelations without the potential for a trip to the

emergency room. I started to have near life experiences.

Near life experiences are the times when you are doing exactly what you want. You are enjoying life, you are having the exact experience you want out of life, and because of that you feel truly fulfilled with the life experience. Near life experiences (NLE's) can come from something as simple as hugging your significant other or as complex as achieving a particularly difficult goal you set for yourself. They come when you are fulfilling your PFE.

When you are having a near life experience, you are absolutely and completely happy. It is the most amazing feeling in the world.

Find those moments for yourself and figure out how to get more of them into your life every day. Experience so many of them that you get to the point where you insist on having a life full of them, a life where you fulfill your PFE.

Have them as soon as possible, because the fantastic thing about experiences, especially near life experiences, is that the sooner in your life you have them, the longer you have to reap the benefits. What you learn at 20, 35, or 50 can be applied for a lot more time and to a lot more situations than what you learn at 85. Even better, the experiences build upon each other. Once the insights start coming, they create this fantastic

foundation of knowledge upon which everything else rests.

Seek out things that are exactly what you want to do. Seek out near life experiences

8. Choose your own metric of success in life

When you have spent time in other countries, and then you come back to the U.S., you realize just how strongly our culture equates success with money. How much do you make? What kind of car do you drive? How big is your house? These are all money based metrics.

If we choose that as our metric, that's fine, just so long as we make sure that we chose it. And when we are deciding what our metric will be, we should keep in mind that money is not the only one. The amount of time we spend each day doing what we want, our degree of fulfillment with life, how happy we are, how much love is in our life, and many others, are also metrics for success in life.

Evaluate them closely because the metrics we choose become the driving force for our actions.

Choose your own metric of success.

9. Act like your life depends on your decisions, because it does

Have you ever been in a discussion where you were debating what to do, and someone

said, "Well what would you do if your life depended on it?" It really puts things in a different perspective doesn't it? Now all of a sudden it is more important. MY LIFE DEPENDS ON IT!!!

Well, in reality, our life depends on the decisions we make every day. Whether or not we achieve and experience what we want out of life is entirely dependent on our daily decisions.

Have you ever heard the term "The Big Five"? The big five is something that you hear all the time when you are on safari in Africa. It stands for rhino, elephant, buffalo, leopard, and lion. People are always asking, "Have you seen the big five? How many of the big five did you see? Where were the big five?"...

I think we should adopt this term for our lives. The Big Five for Life will be the five things we absolutely want to do, see, or experience in our life. The things that on our deathbeds, we will look back on and go, yeah, I did my Big Five for Life.

Wouldn't that be a great conversation starter? "Hi, I'm John, and you are?..." "Nice to meet you. So, what's on your Big Five for Life list and how can I help you fulfill them?"

Although they can be, items on the Big Five for Life list don't have to be things that are one time events. For example, number one on my list is to have a lifelong

loving relationship with my wife. It is something with a non-defined end date. As long as I am here, it is on the list.

The reason I think this would be so fantastic is because we often forget to act like our life depends on our decisions. We get into a pattern and pretty soon we have all these reasons why we can't go do the things we want.

That \$124 Billion of advertising out there often doesn't help. There are all kinds of people trying to scare or convince us to live life a particular way. Having our Big Five for Life would really focus us on the fact that our ability to live the life we dream of, our ability to fulfill our big five, depends on our daily decisions. We need to be conscious of them, and to make sure we don't forget that we are in control of them.

That really becomes impactful when put in the context that life is just a compilation of 28,500 days. It isn't infinite. When the days are no more, we no longer have the chance to fulfill the big five.

Make your daily decisions as if your life depends on it, because it does.

(Note: In my CD series called The Big Five for Life, I go into great detail about my Big Five for Life technique, and how anyone can use it to accelerate their efforts toward success in their lives – however

they define success. For more details visit:
www.whycafe.com/thebigfiveforlife.htm)

10. Choose to work on things you are passionate about and you will always be passionate about what you are working on

Here is a statistic you may find shocking. It shocked me. In an average week, between Monday and Friday, the average person will spend over 70% of their awake life either at work, getting to work, or on work related activities at home.

Almost three fourths of our awake life during the week is spent on work! Now that is something to keep in mind when we are making decisions about what type of work we want to do. "I am choosing to give half of my life to the pursuit of whatever this job is."

If you are going to spend 70% of your awake life on work related items each week, you might as well choose to work on something you are passionate about. I know this can be challenging. We live in this interesting world where people value experience at something over much more important skills like aptitude, general intelligence, drive and many more.

The job someone picks when they graduate college, which after extensive research I have learned is primarily chosen based on the

degree to which it can help pay off student loans and support beer consumption, suddenly becomes their career guidepost for life.

Nonetheless, think of it this way. If there is something else that you have always wanted to do, but lack experience in, every day you don't go do it is a day less of experience you will have. You might as well get started right away.

Choose to work on things you are passionate about and you will always be passionate about what you are working on.

They experts say a good writer always gives readers more than they expect, yet leaves them wanting more. To that end, here is a bonus #11. You'll have to wait for the next article for number #12.

11. Never let anyone else determine what you can or cannot accomplish

If it hasn't happened already, I have no doubt that at some point in your life someone will inform you that you probably do not have the ability to accomplish something that you believe you can do. This is such a tremendous travesty of reality.

No one but you truly knows what you can accomplish. You may decide a particular mountain is too high, or that it is the wrong mountain for you to climb, but never let someone else tell you that

you cannot accomplish the feat of climbing it.

There have been numerous men and women that have proven this to the nth degree. Orville and Wilbur Wright proved that people can fly. Sandra Day O'Connor became the first woman Supreme Court justice in the history of this country. Neil Armstrong stepped on the moon. The individual who most personifies this for me is Mahatma Gandhi.

In a non-violent fashion, he personally took on one of the most powerful empires in the world. What do you think the Las Vegas odds on that confrontation would have been? I don't think too many people would have bet on Gandhi. But he refused to let anyone tell him that he couldn't accomplish his goal, and eventually, he won.

The courage and conviction of a single man was the catalyst that brought an end to England's colonial rule of India and the eventual end of England's colonial rule around the world. He freed an entire nation of people and did it without violence.

Now, I don't know what you've got in store for your life in terms of what you want to do, but I personally don't plan on taking on anything nearly that daunting. He wouldn't let anyone else determine what he could or could not accomplish and neither should you or I.

Toward the end of my book, *The Why Café*, Mike, who is the owner of the café, makes the comment that “life is a great story, it’s just that some people don’t realize that they are the author and they can write it any way they want.” From the bottom of my heart, I wish you all the success in the world at writing, and living, the life that you want- the life of your dreams.

John P. Strelecky is the international best selling author of

*[“The Why Café”](#), *Life Safari*, and *The Big Five for Life – Leadership’s Greatest Secret*. In 2007, he was honored alongside Oprah Winfrey, Wayne Dyer, Deepak Chopra, and Dr. Stephen Covey, as one of the 100 Top Minds in the field of Leadership and Personal Development. John can be reached through his website at www.bigfiveforlife.com, or at jstrelecky@bigfiveforlife.com.*