



## Our Favorite Whats

### Notice Those Experiences That Make It All Worthwhile.

*By John David Mann*

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The other day I was out taking a walk with our dog, Ben. It was the sort of luxuriantly sensory, lavishly fecund spring days that makes you say, "Oh, right—this is why we live in New England!" The kind of day where the oxygen pours out of the trees around you, so palpable you could eat it with a spoon: air by Häagen-Dasz. Ben was going nuts, smelling every blade of grass, his body quivering as it tried to absorb the mob of scents crowding in on his little nose. And I was feeling pretty much the same way.

I heard myself mutter, "This is why I'm here."

What exactly did I mean by that? That my life purpose is to take the dog for a walk?

We walked on, Ben wildly sniffing the dirt, and I pondering the meaning of life. (Each doing what he loves best.) What made this spring-day moment so noteworthy was that it felt so alive. It was like those flowers we always tell ourselves not to forget to stop to smell. There's the loftiness of one's life purpose, the thing mission statements and vision are all about. And then there are the flowers. (Or, if you're Ben, the dirt.) For twenty years, I've been writing about the importance of knowing your compelling why. It occurs to me that it's just as important to know your compelling what.

Just a few of my favorite whats:

Putting the finishing touches on a book I've been working on for months. Gazing, intimidated, at the blank page that signifies the start of the next one.

Discovering a breathtaking author I've never read before. (This month it's Tony Horwitz; last month it was David McCullough.)

Time with my sweetheart, lying on our backs, talking and talking, about anything and everything.

Brahms and more Brahms.

And in networking? What is the best "air by Häagen-Dasz" moment one experiences in this business?

I was on the phone once with Brian Biro, who was interviewing the top leaders in our company to create a leadership profile. He asked what were my goals in the business. I didn't have an answer. I'd had certain financial goals, but I'd already reached those. As I thought about it, a picture popped into mind: a birdcage door opening, its occupant bursting out into the open air and fluttering up and away into the sky.

Seeing people enter this business, I told Brian, caged in the various ways life can imprison, and then find their way to the point where the cage door opens ... watching them enter the open air and fly high—that's my what.

It also makes an excellent why.