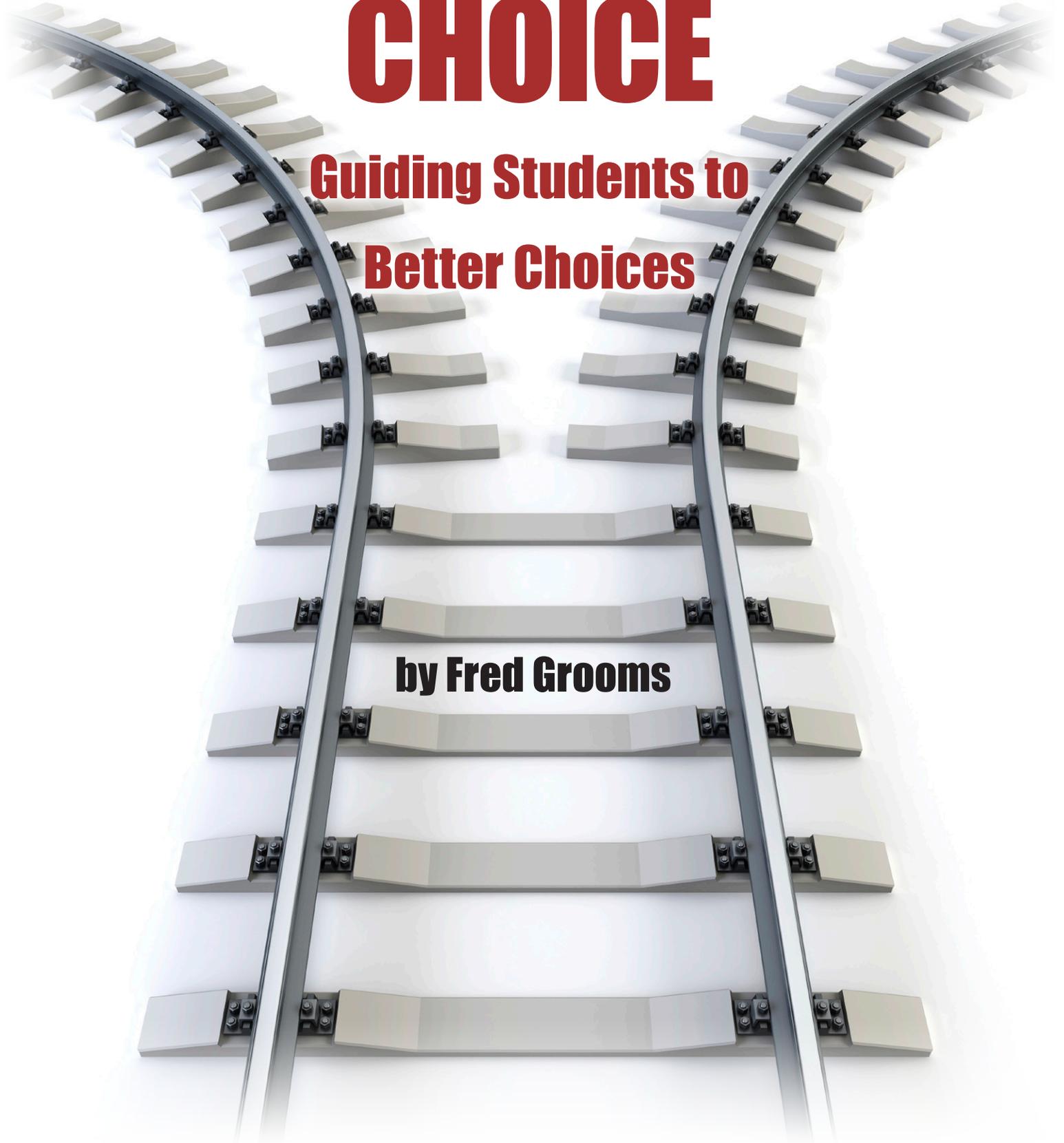


SPECIAL REPORT

THE ANATOMY OF CHOICE

**Guiding Students to
Better Choices**

by Fred Grooms



THE ANATOMY OF CHOICE

EDUCATORS FIND themselves in a position of increased responsibility for teaching students about making choices. We expect you to teach students to understand the impact of their choices and how to make quality choices. Here's a little help.

The following pages will assist you in teaching students to understand the Five Key Components To Student Choice.

You will also find a Framework explaining the complex nature of both choices and decisions.

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Five Key Components To Student Choice

Component One: The Choice Is Theirs

STUDENTS CRAVE the power to make choices for themselves. With over two decades of experience teaching and mentoring students it's been my experience that few students really understand the extent to which they already possess the power make their own choices.

We are all familiar with this statement. "Stop treating me like a child." Most of us have responded to this question with the obvious adult response. "Stop acting like a child." These statements are really about the very real power struggle students have with making quality choices. Here's how you can help. Start with a question.

Who's In Charge of Bob?

Most often when working with students about choice I start with this simple question: "Who's in charge of Bob?"

This might strike you as a strange question, however the answer is very telling.

I'll ask students, "Who's in charge of _____ (Bob)?" They fill in their name in the blank. I will ask the question again. "Who's in charge of you?"

I constantly get the same initial answer... silence. Students look at me as if I've gone mad. The reason students respond in silence is threefold. First, no one has ever asked them who's in charge of them before. Secondly, students respond in silence because they never really spent any time thinking about the answer. The last reason is students actually know they are in charge of themselves, but to admit it requires them to take responsibility for themselves.

The truth is that most young people have complained about not being in charge, even when they are. It's an age old struggle for who has control over their lives. My position is this: Teenagers are more in control of their lives than they realize.

For the majority of students somewhere around age twelve to fourteen they start making decisions for themselves. Most of them don't have a clue how to do this. They just don't understand that much of the conflict and joy that they experience in life is a direct result of the choices they are making or not making.

We need to assist students to realize that they are making choices for themselves and each choice has results. They may choose to do their assignments, show up to class, smoke, drink, or fight with others. They also choose to help their neighbors, teach their sister do her math, pick their friends and graduate from school.

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Component Two: Choices Build Upon Themselves

STUDENTS HAVE a tendency to believe that the choices they make are independent of other choices. The reality is that each choice a student makes is a building block. No choice is solely independent of other choices. This building block process creates who they are. Students and adults alike are all the sum of our choices and experiences.

It's vital to help students to understand that the choices and decisions they make today shape who they are both in the near future and throughout their lives. Students need assistance casting a vision to see how their decisions today affect their job, careers, relationships, health, and finances.

I have yet to meet a student whose set out to be obese. Donuts for breakfast, burgers and fries for lunch, pizza for dinner, no exercise at all, and cookies before bed are all choices that will lead to obesity.

A major choice every student who graduates high school faces is to get a job or continue with school. You and I know this choice is going to affect a significant portion of their lives. What so many students currently in school don't understand is the role their current decisions play in this outcome.

This is where adult mentoring, counseling, and leadership can play such a significant part in assisting students through the process of understanding choice. I would encourage you to find a method that best suits your educational environment to expose them to individuals who can help motivate them in this process.

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Component Three: Choices Affect Others

IF YOU are at all like me, you get extremely frustrated with students who simply don't understand that every choice they make has an effect on those around them. This seems to be especially true for younger students. Who hasn't heard, "Why should what I do matter to anyone else?" My answer is, "It just does."

As adults we understand that we don't live in a vacuum. Our choices and the decisions we make affect other choices and other people. As true as my answer might be, it certainly isn't very satisfying to hear nor does it teach the student about the effects of their choices.

Teaching students to understand that even the smallest choices they make have an effect on those around them is important. Students desire the power to make choices but until they grasp that those choices affect others they don't truly understand the power of choice.

Here is a simply example that works well with students. What happens if you choose not get out of bed on time in the morning? This single choice will cause a chain reaction.

You're late. You don't get a shower or brush your teeth, nor do you eat breakfast. You miss the bus. Your mother now has to take you to school but first she has to take your sister to daycare. You are late to first period class and miss the review for the upcoming test. By the way your mother was late to work again because this isn't the first time you did this. Lunch time comes around and you realize you didn't pick up your lunch off the counter and your wallet is in your other pants on the floor of your bedroom. This means you're bumming food or money off your friends. You begin to wonder why you're having trouble getting your friends to talk to you. Then you remember, "Crap. No shower, no deodorant, and I didn't brush my teeth."

This leads us to the fourth Component of choice.

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Component Four: Choices Have Results

THIS COMPONENT is generally straight forward even for students. Every choice we make has a result. This result leads us to additional choices and decisions.

It's my experience that as educators we tend to focus on the word consequences when we talk about the choices students make. Consequences are generally thought of as being the result of poor choices. We often say, "You'll suffer the consequences of that choice," meaning the negative result. We seem to focus on catching students making bad choices and then pointing out the negative results.

I think we can agree that most students are actually make relatively good choices most of the time. I think it would be great if we spent more time catching students making good choices and pointing them out. The results of making good choices brings great pleasure and joy into their lives.

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Component Five: With Increased Choice Comes Increased Responsibility

WHEN STUDENTS demonstrate the ability to make clear and appropriate choices they will be given the opportunity to make more choices. With the increased freedom to make choices comes the responsibility to understand the results of those choices. The more consistent students are in making appropriate choices the greater the value of the choices become.

Students will gain the ability to master the first four components of choice. They will come to understand that they are in charge of themselves. They will realize that the decisions they make build who they are and who they will become. This includes grasping that their choices affect those around them. When this is accomplished we will gladly increase their opportunity to make choices for themselves and give them additional responsibility.

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Choice Framework

Understanding Choice

Not so many years ago choices were more limited than they are today. We were faced with choices of yes or no, take it or leave it, or perhaps choosing from the easy way or the hard way. Today's society is faced with an abundance of choice in most every area of life. This cornucopia of choice has the tendency to mire our ability to take action.

However, when you get right down to it there are two modes of choice, immediate and static. Choices are also unquestionably linked to one's ability to make decisions.

Choices and decisions are not the same. If you look up the synonyms for choice you will find that decision is not one of them. Decisions require action, and a choice may or may not require you take action. Choices are simply an opportunity for making a selection between one or more options. Choices are most often IMMEDIATE or strangely enough STATIC.

IMMEDIATE CHOICE

Most people, adults and students alike, put very little thought into how they make choices. The vast majority of the choices we make each day are made unconsciously and immediately. We place little value upon them and put little thought into the resulting consequences associated with those choices. Each consequence is typically met with another choice quickly and unconsciously made.

Examples: Brushing your teeth, taking a shower, driving to work, or scratching your head are all choices we make immediately without much thought. Immediate choices take virtually no effort. We proceed through our lives making tens of thousands of choices every day. The immense number of choices may go unnoticed until one of those choices forces us to stop and take notice of the consequences, or we are faced with multiple options not quickly resolved.

When a choice brings us to a standstill it becomes a static choice.

STATIC CHOICE

Choices requiring options that take a mental process of making a judgment, selection, or requiring a solution to a problem are static choices. They remain static until you enter into a decision making process. Static choices are full of possibilities, and we must make a decision to realize those possibilities.

Examples: What will I eat for lunch today? The traffic is heavy, so do I take a different route home? Should I talk with my boss today? All of these choices remain static until you decide to take action.

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Static choices can be made quickly, but they still require us to enter into the decision making process. We are required to slow down long enough to weigh our options, assess the situation, or identify the problem. This is the foundation of the decision making process.

This is also the point at which we tend to fail our students. We often fail to teach student how to make appropriate choices. We expect them to magically start making great choices without teaching them how. Specifically, we tend not teach students how to evaluate the choices that have been made previously. It's easy to criticize without explanation. It's also just as easy to celebrate the win without understanding the process that got them there.

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Understanding The Decision Making Process

As mentioned before, choices and decisions are not the same, they are however unquestionably linked. Choices and decisions do not exist without each other. A decision is literally the process of making a choice. This process can happen rapidly, at times almost immediately, and with little to no effort. The process can also take a great deal of time and effort.

Making a decision is a process. We follow this process in some form with each decision we make. There are a number of models to follow in the decision making process. Some are very extensive going through multiple steps, and others are less complicated. Here is a simple six step model of the decision making process.

Six Step Decision Making Process:

- 1) Define the situation, problem, or option
- 2) Identify the available solutions/alternatives
- 3) Evaluate the identified alternatives
- 4) Make a decision
- 5) Implement the decision
- 6) Evaluate the decision

The Situation: You start your day with coffee.

Available Solutions: Should you go with sugar or the sugar substitute?

Evaluating the Alternatives: You know you don't need the extra calories, or the sugar high, but the substitute might be killing you slowly.

Make a Decision: You go for the sugar.

Implement the Decision: You have three scoops of sugar, and add in the cream for good measure.

Evaluate the Decision: Your taste buds and colleagues thank you for drinking coffee. Your heart rate elevates and you regret the calories.

Granted this is a simple and hopefully humorous example that serves the point well. We follow a process in the way we make decisions. Not everyone follows the exact same process, but none the less we follow a process.

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Decisions making is both a science and an art. It's a science because decision making can have very specific quantifiable results. Any corporation will tell you that they have to have a decision making process in place or the operation can easily come to a halt. The same is true in education. You must have a plan in place to assist your students in creating class schedules. This process has quantifiable results for the staff, teachers and students.

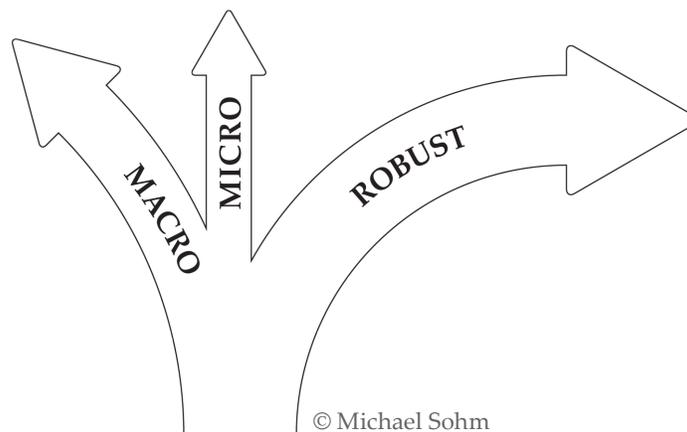
Decision making is also an art. Everyone I'm sure knows someone who just seems to have a knack for making decisions and making them well. Others of us can't even decide what to have for dinner. No matter your skill level at making decisions you are still faced with the process daily.

Within the decision making process there are three primary categories of decisions.

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3 Categories Of Decisions

THERE ARE three main categories of decision making



Micro Decisions: Small everyday decisions we make with little effort. These decisions occur thousands of times a day. They are part of our daily routine. These decisions when associated with choice are most often made immediately with little effort.

Examples: Do I use sugar or sugar substitute my coffee? Mayo or mustard on my sandwich? Open my email now or later?

Macro Decisions: Larger decisions often made daily but not part of our daily routine. Macro decisions when associated with choice are most often static. They require us to stop and take a more cognitive approach to the decision making process.

Examples: How will I handle the discipline of a student? Do we plan an assembly for spirit week? Perhaps you have to decide to hire a new staff member. What's the best way to honor our teacher of the year?

Robust or Major Decisions: These decisions are made periodically. Robust decisions are typically made only a couple of times a week or less. These decision often come up unexpectedly. These types of decisions force us into the decision making process. Robust decisions are often problems or situations not easily defined. They usually take time to identify solutions and evaluate the alternatives. Making these decisions are often stressful, and once implemented can create a host of new choices and decisions.

Examples: How do we make the assigned budget cuts without cutting personnel? You have to choose between two highly qualified teachers to fill an opening. Your students have been invited to participate in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, so how do you raise the money? Perhaps you're faced with increasing graduation rates.

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Perspective Affects Choice

EVERYONE'S CAPACITY to make decisions is different. We all have vastly different perspective on the choices we are faced with, and our perspective affects the three primary drives of choice.

Here are ten different perspectives on how we go about making choices.

Rationally: What seems to make reasonable sense to you at any given time.

Logic: All facts point to a specific answer. Facts tend to be black or white and that's the way people like it.

Intuitive: Your "gut" feeling about any given situations guides you.

Priorities: Some things just have to happen in order.

Pros and Cons: Listing the perceived positive and negative values to each option.

Either/Or: All things are equal just pick one.

Authority: You assign authority to another person or group and tend to follow their decision.

Flipism: A coin toss will do. This is different than either or. Flipism doesn't assume all things are equal. As a matter of fact they can be vastly different.

Participative: Joint ventures with others or a meeting of the minds and seeking advice.

Faith: Your beliefs guide you.

Each perspective is different. You may invoke more than one of these in making choices. One's perspectives may even change with any given situation. But you have to ask what drives your perspective?

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3 Primary Drives Affecting Choice

I BELIEVE there are three drives to how we make choices. These drives are interconnected and happen simultaneously.



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Experience is easy enough to understand. It's the external factors of our lives that affect who we are. Experience is the knowledge and skill we have acquired over time based upon our exposure to any given situation. We are ultimately a sum of those experiences. Everyone has a unique level of experience. No one person is working from the same set of experiences affecting their perspective.

Integrity is your moral center, virtues, and ethics. Integrity guides your values, consistency, and honesty. You demonstrate your integrity through your actions. It's who you are when no one is looking.

Core Personality is the internal noise of who you are. Your core personality is about your unique natural talents and strengths. It's how you react to pressure, pleasure, and pain. Your core personality is unlikely to change overtime.

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Conclusion

STUDENTS ARE expected to be responsible for the choices and decisions they make. Unfortunately, little time is spent actually teaching students to understand the process by which they make decisions.

Once students really understand that they are actually in charge of their decisions, we can then teach them about how each choice builds upon the other. They can learn how each choice affects others and how to take responsibility for the results. As they gain experience with the decision making process they will increase their ability to make quality choices for their future.

I HOPE you have found this special report on choices helpful. Please feel free to share this information with your students, faculty and staff.

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About the Author

FRED GROOMS is an author, speaker, educator, and owner of Barnabas Consulting. He has over two decades of experience motivation, teaching, and mentoring students. Fred speaks to students at assemblies, student conferences, and teaches seminars to students and staff. He works with college and university student services, guidance, college and career placement services and leadership groups.

His humorous stories of failure and success keeps students tuned in, as he tells his inspirational story of overcoming the learning disability of dyslexia. Fred understands the difficult choices students face every day. He was once faced the choice of dropping out of school or sticking it out to graduation. He choose to graduate.

At Barnabas Consulting, Fred works with educators and students in middle school through college. It is his goal to assist students in becoming more of who they already are. He believes it's vital to teach students to understand the role their choices and decisions play today, tomorrow and into the distant future. It's also essential for students to be able to identify their unique talents and strengths as part of their core personality. These elements play fundamental roles in the decision making process.

It's unfortunate, but seldom are students taught how uniquely talented they are. Fred believes that teaching students to uncover their talents is actually quite an easy step to take. Many studies back this up. Students who can identify their talents and strengths are more likely to graduate, have better academic performance, have decreased discipline issues, and report being happier.

**"It would be my pleasure to assist you in supporting your students.
My greatest passion is helping others find their way."
—Fred Grooms**

You can find Fred on the internet at:

www.fredonchoices.com

www.fredgrooms.com

www.strengthsdevelopment.com

Feel free to contact Fred at Barnabas Consulting:

Fred Grooms

Barnabas Consulting

13 Crescent Lake

Blythewood, SC 29016

803-730-3934

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Design and layout by Michael Sohm.
michael.stewart.sohm@gmail.com