

What Choice Do I Have?

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my father, for his encouragement and to my mother, for her optimism.

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Foreword

A Choice to Follow Your Dreams

*“Destiny is not a matter of chance,
it is a matter of choice.
It is not a thing to be waited for;
it is a thing to be achieved.”*
William Jennings Bryan

What an honor! I am excited to tell you why this book and its author are going to become important parts of your lives. The privilege of being asked to write the foreword of any book is the highest of peer recognition. The honor I feel for being selected to foreword such an important book cannot be put into words.

My only hope is to create the sense of urgency inside you to read and apply this life-enhancing information. Do that and the world will become a better place for you as well as others—*because of your choices*. And the coming pages will compel you to take action. You will no longer allow yourself to be a victim of circumstances. Instead, you will more actively choose to create your own.

Choice. What a powerful concept. It’s what separates us from every living organism on the planet. Consciously or unconsciously, we *choose* our life path or allow others to do so, which is also a choice. Unfortunately, many people don’t understand that they themselves made practically all the choices which have lead to their current circumstances. Michael Kerrigan’s excellent work will clear up any doubt you may have had about that. It will also encourage you to take back any control of your life that you have let go—*by teaching you how to make better choices*.

Do you believe the world is split between the *haves* and *have nots*? Do you believe there are those who were born to make it and those who were born to work for those who make it? Unfortunately, many people drive themselves to an early grave resenting the people they believe were just “lucky” in life.

Fortunately, the “have/have not” theory is totally incorrect. The world is, in fact, divided into two groups. But they’re not the groups many were led to believe existed. This book shares how you can identify them and decide which group *you’d* like to belong to. It also provides the guidance you’ll need to become part of the group you choose, and more importantly, how to share that information with others.

My perspective is that the two groups are the *haves* and the *have tos*. First, there are those who *have* already made the choice and are now reaping the rewards. Then there are those who *have to*—they choose to let others choose for them. In either case, the choices made or not made will certainly determine where they spend the rest of their lives.

Your life and where you are right now is the sum total of every choice you’ve ever made or allowed others to make for you. Those of you not satisfied with your current station in life may argue that you wouldn’t *choose* to be where you are in a million years. While that may well be true, the fact of the matter is every choice has a consequence and you are now living the consequences of your past choices!

It’s a lot like complaining about never winning the lottery, yet every week *choosing* not to buy a ticket. I believe if you ask most people if they’d love to win the lottery, they’d say yes. So, while you may want the rewards that come with the winning numbers, if you choose not to ever take a chance on a ticket, you can never win. It’s as simple as that.

Did you know that the average writer quits after being turned down by ten publishers? Over 100 publishers had rejected me before I signed a contract for my first book, *Reject Me – I Love it! 21 Secrets for Turning Rejection Into Direction*. It is my belief that many other writers *choose* to let the opinions of a few determine their lives. I *chose* to do whatever it took to see my name on the cover of a book.

The result of so many writers quitting the race to be published is that you’ll never read what could have been a great help to you. No one will ever be inspired by their potential to help others because they didn’t persist. And many of those same would-be authors will tell anyone who listens that getting published is simply a matter of “luck”

and who you know. But simply because I *chose* to continue the race, I have been able to help over one million people—a result that a few short years ago was just a dream!

Simply because I made a choice, I'm now doing what I choose to do while the wanna-be authors who gave up aren't authors. They simply *chose* to give up! Have I spoken all over the world because I'm more talented? Hardly. Do I have an inside track to the publishing and speaking industry? No. Am I just lucky? Not even close.

The simple truth is I was willing to do what each of you is about to discover in this great book. I was willing to ask myself, "What choice do I have?" I then made the choice to commit myself to writing and going through the noes until a publisher said yes to a book proposal and an organization said yes to my speaking for them.

Now I can honestly say that I am living the life of my dreams. But the only question is, "How about you?" Just ask yourself, "What Choice Do I Have?" To go from where you are today to where you want to be tomorrow is simply a matter of choice—not chance. After all, you have all the choices there are!

I wish you much success in choosing what's best for your future. *What Choice Do I Have?* can help you do that. Read it and start making better choices.

John Fuhrman
Frame of Mind, Inc.
Manchester, New Hampshire

Introduction

We all want what's best for us and those we care about, right? At least we're *supposed* to. But, all too often there's a gap—our choices and actions don't always support our wants!

When a significant event finally *does* occur, oftentimes initiated by someone else whose choices and actions support *their* wants, we may be forced to move on or make a choice that may affect the rest of our lives. At this pivotal point, many of us can actually *see* our potential and how we could pursue our dreams. So why don't we always embrace it? Because in all too many cases, we panic out of fear of change, and actually run away from our dreams!

“Thank goodness I'm past that,” we may sigh with relief. And then we return to whatever we were doing before—we've avoided the risk of change but never set ourselves up to experience what our life *could* have been like.

We may discard the whole idea of reaching for something better, but our anxiety about what we *are* doing always returns. The anguish over what our lives could be like—if we had chosen to go for what we really wanted—pays us another visit.

And so it goes. We're all challenged in different areas of our lives, whether it's in relationships, our job or business, dealing with ourselves, or a myriad of other things. For example, you either have a great relationship with someone, or you don't!

Many of those in committed relationships have created happy, contented alliances. But all too many others endure this part of their lives under a cloud of second-guessing—either they know their relationship could be better, or they've settled for how it is, knowing it could be far worse.

For those without a relationship, there's the annoying daily reminder from the cartoon strip *Cathy* that they must meet the “perfect”

person. There's the perception that once they're in a relationship their life will be complete. At least that's what they think until, of course, they prove themselves wrong. And underlying most of these relationship perspectives is a yearning for improvement and the desire for a life that will bring more fulfillment and happiness.

Then there's the business cycle. Those who have a job typically want a better one. And those who are without a job just want to get a foot in the door.

Another piece of the business puzzle includes millions of people who own their own businesses—many times in addition to their jobs. They have opted out of the typical job world, or are planning to do so, to take their chances on their own as storeowners, manufacturers, marketers, consultants, franchisees, direct salespeople, or in running a home-based business.

Whether they do it voluntarily or not, all of these entrepreneurs are forced to examine their condition at least once a day: “Did I do the right thing? Why am I alone in this extra bedroom? How is it that my closest business confidante is now the cat?” Hints of doubt, pressure, indecision, and change abound—especially for those with businesses that eat up virtually all of their time.

Beyond these predictable areas of day-to-day living are the realms of change involving social relationships, health, kids, where you live, where you *don't* live, aging, politics, and even death. The list could go on indefinitely, but the message is clear: *We all need to deal with the challenges that burst into our lives, and take responsibility for the outcomes we create.* And as you may have noticed, many people don't do much of either. Their lives are like stockpiles of unresolved issues for which they blame others.

This book can help you clarify your choices and create the best outcomes possible. And who couldn't use a hand in navigating life's annoyances *and* opportunities when they appear and announce, “We're here”?

In all the areas of life just mentioned, people crave to be in charge. They'd like to have more control. People want to know the most efficient and effective way to manage the challenges they face every day.

The title of this book is what it is for a good reason. Many people either don't realize or they simply forget that their life is made up of a series of choices. In fact, you are where and what you are today because of all the choices you've made up to this point in time. And, of course, not making a choice is also a choice!

So what's the answer to the title's question? That's easy. *You have all the choices there are!* The challenges for most people in exercising them however, lies in something called the "comfort zone." It's a place where things are familiar: people, jobs, foods, attitudes, and old pairs of jeans. We like this zone because we know pretty much what to expect out of every waking moment. We rely on it to give us the things we want, or believe we want.

But the *comfort zone* most likely isn't comfortable at all, is it? Oftentimes it's just *familiar*. And it's probably a place of *stale* outcomes and *pale* rewards. It could also be called the *boring zone* or even the *settle-for zone!*

In fact, this place is really more of a *survival zone*, and it's where most people live out their lives. They're surviving, doing just enough to get by. Here they're busy, but not especially productive in terms of realizing their personal dreams.

Sadly, many people don't even realize they've lost or missed relationships and opportunities because it never occurred to them to reach out to others or experience something new. They've operated this way for as long as they can remember since *survival* doesn't require letting anyone or anything new into their lives. And in most cases, everyone around them is operating the same way, doing the same thing. They consider survival normal, and that they're doing okay.

The possibility of choosing positive change in your survival zone is almost nil. Any hope of achieving your dreams is virtually impossible when you're settled back and choosing to settle for things just as you always have in the past. Fortunately, the survival zone is nothing more than a *mental* barrier but it will keep you from making better choices—until *you* decide to take action and break through its walls.

This book will provide you with the kind of anecdotes and self-assessing exercises that will help you get your life into perspective. It will help you put together a plan to reach the goals you could never attain without choosing to go beyond the survival zone.

Without some guidance and feedback, it's all too easy to become pessimistic—to doubt our strengths and forget our basic courage—even with our best efforts to cope. Without some kind of perspective, there's a general perception that the choices we make could always be better. There's a reason that the term *buyer's remorse* is part of our language. For some reason, there's a tendency to distrust our own instincts and actions.

This book is designed to help you determine what is most important to you and to help you make the choices that will ultimately lead you to the best possible outcomes. Actively guiding yourself every day is a challenge to your courage and confidence—elements you already have, but may have simply lost touch with. But reaching for a fulfilled life—a life that is rightfully yours—is something everyone can do. Take responsibility for where you are and where you’re going and you’ll have the necessary control over your thoughts, dreams, and actions.

This book gives you the tools you need to make a smarter run at life. When was the last time you heard someone say, “Gee, if I only knew then what I know now”? What is covered here will enable you to do just that—harness your wisdom and experience and use it to your best advantage. You’ll have the tools to direct your life in the most positive and fulfilling way you could imagine.

Regrettably, every day, millions of people run away from opportunities to improve their lives. In case after case, all over the world, people choose to stay where they are. And all too often, their choices leave them careening through life, bruised by disappointment and deflated by frustration.

But that isn’t *your* choice. What separates you from so many others is your willingness to take positive action on your own behalf. And simply by picking up this book, you’ve done three things:

- Confirmed that you haven’t yet reached your full potential.
- Shown you are willing to embrace another, more productive way of living.
- Taken positive action on your own behalf.

That willingness to be an active player in your own life is a huge step in mastering the life that awaits you. And this book can be a tremendous benefit to you in taking charge of who you are and what you *will* become. What is discussed in these pages — though addressed with modern day examples — has its roots in basic principles that reach back more than 200 years, the inseparable principles of freedom and choice.

Ever since the leaders of free countries throughout the world chose to declare their independence from opposing forces, significant challenges and opportunities have dotted their histories: the choice to

ensure undying freedoms for the nations' peoples, the choice to fight wars to banish tyranny and preserve freedom, the choice to embrace people of various religious beliefs and ethnic origins. Each of these conscious acts, and countless more throughout the free world, have helped keep dreams alive by strengthening each country's foundation and helping it to endure and prosper.

Even the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the U.S. on the civilized countries of the world—calls on each of us to make a choice: to stand up and address the threat on our precious principles and hard-won freedoms, or wilt under the strain. Each of us has the capacity to empower ourselves and others, to live our lives and achieve our dreams, despite the attempts by outside forces to chip away at our confidence and challenge our will.

The day we stop dreaming and striving, terrorism wins. So now, more than ever, we need to dream big dreams and do whatever it takes to achieve them. And that is certainly the best choice of all!

How you choose to live your life will determine the legacy that will follow and the ideology that will prevail. In short, your future and your success are carried in your own two hands.

The ideas and discussions you'll find here are based, in part, on sound psychology, sociology, and other related disciplines. The message you'll discover—that of self-determination—has grown out of my experiences as a journalist, coupled with the seminars I've conducted and research I've carried out during the past decade.

Doing research and putting findings into a usable form is what I do best. I spent 11 years reporting for and editing newspapers and magazines all over the U.S. beginning in Berkeley, California and ending in Washington, D.C.

My understanding of how people cope and choose was sharpened every day I went to work. If people weren't choosing and changing—usually for the worse—they weren't a story! It was the nature of my job to watch people grapple with change and observe how they emerged from their experiences. Some, of course, fared better than others.

For example, someone always won each election. But for every winner there were two or three others who didn't assume office, being left to piece together their lives and move on. Even the winners had a whole new set of issues to deal with and tough challenges to

resolve. I sometimes wondered whether they had actually won anything at all!

Then there were the businesses that closed, leaving scores of people shaking their heads at being out of work, pondering the choices they had to make. My reporting experiences also included dozens of other cases—some violent, some ironic—where people’s lives changed instantly and dramatically, forever. And my experience as a mediator has given me a clear understanding of people’s motives when their wants, needs, and desires are challenged.

You’ll have plenty of opportunities to put the anecdotes and ideas to good use. Remember that taking that first step toward a new goal or a new way of living is something you can do anytime. There’s no age restriction and no salary requirement. The only things necessary are your will to act and your desire to give yourself the life you truly want—by making the best choices you can. My hope is that you find this book helpful in doing so.

*“Destiny
is not a matter
of chance, it is a
matter of choice. It
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achieved.”*

William Jennings Bryan

Chapter 1

What Do You Want?

The Most Meaningful Choice You Can Make

*“When you opt for your dreams,
you open yourself up to a whole
new world of possibilities. You’ll grow
and learn in ways you probably
never have imagined.”*

Michael Kerrigan

The quality of your life depends on making important, meaningful choices. And there’s one choice that serves as the foundation for defining who you are and where you are going. It’s a fundamental choice that drives all others, and results in making your life and its opportunities work *for* you.

Address that choice honestly and you’ll be well on your way to making a chain of positive choices. This ripple of truth will help you manage difficult issues and identify your true calling.

Of course, you can always choose another road—you can opt to be less than honest with yourself. But if you do, you’re destined to stay right where you are. You’ll get lost in a swirl of people and their agendas that grow and evolve without much concern for you and your desires.

The key question you need to ask yourself is: *“What do I want?”*

We’re all confronted by this question dozens of times every day. It begins from the moment that wonderful alarm clock blasts through the silence of the morning dark. Would you like to have

just five more minutes of sleep, or do you really *want* to get out of bed and go to work?

The question continues to persist during your morning commute. Do you want to give someone else a ride in the carpool you may be in, or do you want to review the details of a presentation you need to make later in the day? Do you want to listen to the radio, an educational/motivational tape or CD, or ride in silence?

What do you want?

Sometimes the answer is subconscious, nothing more than a reflex. Yes, no. Do, don't. File, throw away. At other times, the answer is calculated to avoid confrontations, win compliments, or simply buy time. And sometimes it's even "I don't know!"

Take the case of Lynn. Her answer to that daunting question was always complex. She wanted to avoid confrontation, because it meant fighting. Her thinking was that clashing points of view could never be resolved through discussion. She believed such exchanges always flared into arguments, and she really disliked it when people argued.

Lynn also wanted to buy time. More time meant not having to meet deadlines and less pressure. Pressure made her nervous, and "I'm already frail," Lynn told herself. She was able to survive this way for seven years. She avoided uncomfortable conversations and those dreaded deadlines right up to the day she was fired.

What Lynn wanted may have been comfortable for her, but it was unrealistic for everyone else. Her wants were impractical and she wasn't being honest with herself. Lynn's behavior highlights one of the critical elements in dealing with change, and that is *honesty*.

When you're honest with yourself, the choices you make are more likely to get you what you want. Honest answers will usher you to the destination you want to reach. Without honesty, each choice you make is built on a lie—the father of disappointment.

For Lynn, the disappointment was being fired. Honesty about how she was spending her time, her level of commitment, and her relationships with others in her office could have saved her job. Unfortunately, she chose deception.

So, *what do you want?*

Do you want to put in another hour of work before you go to bed? Do you want to finish reading that book or completing that special project?

The questions demanding answers don't end until you turn out the light and drift off to sleep. And sometimes they don't even stop then.

The question is pervasive. Typically it involves minor issues—what to have for lunch, whether or not to exercise, which television show to watch, or whether to watch TV at all! Occasionally, you're asked to make choices that can have profound impacts, not only for you, but also for your family, your co-workers or business associates, and any employees you may have.

Now ask yourself these four questions?

- Is this profession right for me?
- Do I want to invest more time and energy in working my job?
- Do I want my own business?
- Do I want to stay in this relationship, or any relationship?

Handing Off Responsibility

Before you answer any of these questions, it's important to understand what brought you to this point in your life. The reasons you are where you are today are based on a host of choices that were made throughout your life. Initially, they were choices that were made *for* you—usually by your parents.

As a child, what *you* thought may have made little difference, because it may have seemed as though you were just along for the ride. You certainly didn't feel like you were “in charge.”

The choices made for you and about you involved the belief systems of those who were guiding you—that education is or isn't important, that hard work is or isn't the passport to a better life, and that treating people fairly is or isn't a guiding principle in establishing meaningful relationships.

In addition, choices of religion were made for you. You may have been raised as a strong Catholic, observing Mass each Sunday and following the direction of the Pope. Or you may have been raised as an Orthodox Jew, with strict adherence to Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Or you may have been raised with another religion or no religious affiliation at all.

Choices were also made for you about where you were raised. And directly linked to geography were cultural biases that influenced you—the sports you played, the books you read, and the people you called friends.

But at some point in your life that all started to change. Your parents began making fewer choices *for* you. At some point, you decided what clothes to wear and what food to eat. You chose where you wanted to go to school and the nature of your work. And you decided what relationships you'd establish and how you'd live your life.

Where you are today is the sum total of all those choices—the good, the bad, and, yes, the *ugly*. And just as those past choices got you where you are today, the choices you make from now on will determine where you go tomorrow. Just make sure to choose what *you* want. And above all, make sure you're honest with yourself when you do.

Your Survival or Your Dreams?

When it comes to choosing your goals and the paths to reach them, there are basically two ways to go. You can settle for *survival*, or you can pursue your *dreams*.

When you opt for your dreams, you open yourself up to a whole new world of possibilities. You'll grow and learn in ways you could never have imagined. And while most of those adventures will be positive, others won't. Not every step toward your dreams will be easy or magical. But each step will be based on possibilities and potential.

You'll need to make conscious decisions and ongoing choices that won't always be welcomed by others. In fact, some of those people and circumstances will need to be left behind—and that could be challenging. After all, who wants to abandon the people and things they've spent so much time with? But if those relationships aren't supporting you in achieving the life you want and need, can you really justify keeping them?

Are you still friends with your classmates from the first grade, high school, or even college? If you go through life with more than a couple of true friends, you are fortunate indeed. It's just a fact of life. As we grow and become who we were created to be, relationships change. There simply isn't enough time to be close to everyone you've ever known and accomplish new goals in your life.

This doesn't mean you discard people along the way either. The relationships that are precious to you will remain so. It's just that as you move on, new people will automatically come into your life and occupy some of your time. Who knows? You may not even have yet met the person who will become your best friend for life!

True friends will remain so even if you don't see them as much as you used to. And if they choose not to participate in whatever changes you choose to make in your life, they will always support you and your new positive choices. If they don't, they're probably not your friends!

Adjusting to new people and changing situations doesn't happen overnight, but it can be made much easier by:

- Understanding where you're comfortable in your life and why.
- Identifying how the relationships you currently have are either helping you or hindering you.

Proactively choosing what you want will reward you with personal growth and virtually unlimited opportunities. You'll be moving in a direction that will help you realize your dreams.

Of course, there is always a second option when you are navigating change: It's called *survival*. But choosing the familiar is not likely to take you on the path to your dreams. And it probably won't be very exciting or rewarding either.

In most cases, pursuing the familiar keeps you exactly where you are. It leaves you walking in circles, covering the same territory with the scenery never changing. And sadly, this often leads to a life lived on little more than a treadmill.

We all operate in a zone where we mix with familiar people and places, habits and beliefs. Yes, staying in it can give you a sense of stability and the belief that things are normal. But your experience here will be essentially what it's always been—going to the same places, engaging in the same conversations and performing the same rituals. And that's the best you can hope for.

Now for some people this may be fine. There is a lot to be said for stability. For many people, though, it's hard to separate stability from drudgery. And since you're reading this book, it's obvious you're ready to make some changes. Guiding yourself toward your goals and dreams requires making new choices. And analyzing them and selecting what's best for you takes some thought.

You Have All the Choices There Are!

You now have the chance to choose exactly what you want. You'll find a list of options, from generating enough income to live out your wildest dreams to spending unlimited time with your family, or for

learning or travel. Take a look at the list. Your dream may be on it, or your idea of true happiness and success may be something no one has ever thought of before. No matter what, though, examine the list and then identify what it is you want more than anything else in the world. Here are some ideas for you:

- More time with your family
- Enough time and money to live out your wildest dreams
- Social status
- A leadership role in the community
- A beautiful new home
- An outlet for your creative energy
- Worthwhile, satisfying relationships
- A meaningful career
- Unlimited time for thought and study
- Opportunities to travel
- A rewarding business of your own

Next, you'll find a series of questions related to whatever your desires are. They will help you focus on how you're going to achieve your dream. You may have answers ready for these questions, or you may need to invest some additional time charting your course. But, either way, be sure to answer all of them. They will help you clarify what it is you really want and how you're going to go about getting it:

- First, is your want now within your reach?
- If it's not within your reach, how are you going to go about getting it?
- Do you have the right education?
- Do you need financing?
- Do you need to adjust your family or other obligations?
- Are you in the right place—geographically—to get what it is you want?
- Who can help you, and what can they do to assist you?

Answering each of these questions honestly will give you a better sense of what you want to pursue, as well as the challenges you're likely to encounter along the way. And there will always be hurdles to overcome. Answering these inevitable questions now will help put

your goal into perspective, giving you a clearer picture of how you're going to achieve it.

This is an essential first step in bringing positive, productive change into your life. Identifying what you *really* want and plotting your course to achieve it makes for an exciting, challenging adventure—one that you've custom made for yourself.