THE ART OF BEING AUTHENIC

NINE PRINCIPLES TO LIVING AUTHENTICALLY YOU!



THE ART OF BEING AUTHENTIC

Tracey R. Cobb LPC, NCC, CMFT

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The events and conversations in this book have been set down to the best of the author's ability, although some names and details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

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This book is dedicated to the memory of my father, Herbert L. Cobb.

Thank you for giving so much and asking for so little in return.

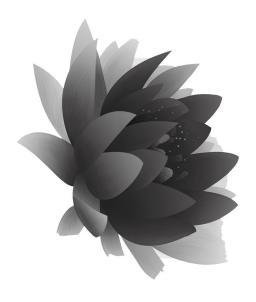
Love never fails. 1 Corinthians 13:8



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LIVING AUTHENTICALLY YOU AND THE LOTUS FLOWER

magine a stunning flower that grows in the muddy water of still ponds and lakes. Deeply rooted in the soil under water, it pushes forth, growing through the dirt until it reaches the light of the sun. From this murky beginning in a hostile environment, a beautiful flower emerges. This flower is the lotus.

Like the lotus flower, I am blossoming through life's difficulties, no matter how challenging they might be. Despite tough circumstances, I know there's beauty and life on the other side. I also know there's no way to move but forward, and I

fiercely challenge all the things that try to hold me back. Living Authentically is the vehicle by which I travel along this journey. Living Authentically began as a personal vision, one that daily reminded me to practice self-love and self-compassion. As I began to openly discuss authenticity and this book's concept, others around me began to share their need for the same self-love and compassion. This is when I realized I could help others move forward and that I was destined to lead with love. As a therapist, life coach, and relationship strategist, I endeavor to meet my clients and others who cross my path exactly where they are on their respective journeys.

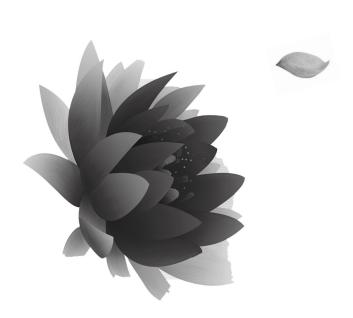
Therapists often focus on maladaptive thoughts and behaviors to help people overcome being stuck in the past. In order for me to truly assist someone's process of moving forward, I offer a safe, therapeutic space, empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard.

Life coaching is similar to therapy when it comes to creating the space for empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard, but when it comes to people's circumstance, it's adaptive. While someone who seeks to overcome trauma or dysfunction would look to therapy specifically, those who seek life coaching are focused on their

future. As a relationship strategist, I work with clients to help them understand the nuances of love and relationships and to prepare them for healthy, loving relationships based on genuine reciprocity.

Within these different approaches I employ various vehicles (trainings, writing materials, webinars, and support groups) to help individuals find the truest version of themselves while discovering what empowers them to walk in their life's purpose. The results are often very different from what people initially expected or believed. I am determined for people to know that no matter what challenges they might face in life, there is a place to find healing, strength, and support. That place is found in *Living Authentically You*.

Introduction





"I am beautifully made inside and out—as I accept myself, I offer the world permission to Live Authentically."

his book began as the journey of a little girl who was never quite sure of herself. I didn't realize it then, but my life was filled with plenty of love and support, and I was constantly surrounded by family and friends—safe from many of the challenges that other children faced. I had the perceived basics for a happy life—a stay-at-home mom, a hard-working dad, a room of my own in a suburban home complete with an apple tree and swing set in the backyard. I was an above-average student who

could have been an A student if I had only worked a little harder.

Growing up, I was constantly told I was beautiful by many of my family members, but I struggled to believe that truth. I had smooth, dark chocolate skin, large brown eyes, full lips, and a head full of thick hair—but that wasn't "enough" in my mind. I didn't see beauty when I looked in the mirror, and I always felt just a little bit unsteady and unsure of myself.

As I think back on it, I don't believe I ever wanted to be or look like anyone else. But I wrestled with my identity and didn't place much value on my being because I was searching for that validation elsewhere. I often looked to others to uplift me, and I spent most of my teen and youngadult years pursuing that love and validation I so desperately craved.

Now, it's easy to see that I would have been considered to have low self-esteem, something I'm sure many people have dealt with at one time or another. Thankfully, I was able to stay away from looking for "love" in all of the wrong places and didn't indulge in activities such as drugs, misdeeds, or promiscuity. I was able to keep away from a fate that tripped up many others, and it's probably because I had a healthy fear of causing

trouble or the sometimes unwritten and unspoken rules placed on me by my parents in order to honor them. I worked so hard to meet their expectations (and still do at times), but I realize I did not expect much from myself when it came to loving me. I was experiencing the uncertainty of a little girl who was lost. A combination of unchecked behavior and an unhealed heart shaped me into a woman who sought approval and validation from men because she wasn't able to see her worth. My experiences with men opened a vortex that eventually impacted every meaningful part of my life.

In many relationships I felt an obligation to give, no matter what. I didn't feel worthy enough to communicate my wants and needs to the men I dated. I'm reminded of the age-old proverb: "if I can't love myself then how can I expect someone else to love me?" I knew the type of relationship I desired to experience with potential mates, but I didn't have the courage to expect and, if required, demand it. To make matters worse I found myself drawn to emotionally unavailable men.

Emotionally unavailable men (and women for that fact) are incapable of creating and sustaining emotional bonds with others. They're often only interested in situations where *their* needs are being met and are often unable to engage in meeting the needs of anyone around them, whether in a romantic or a platonic relationship. This is often a defense mechanism put in place as a response to early trauma and is used to keep them safe. Whether people with these traits intend to or not, their behaviors can cause damage to the people they're in relationships with, causing others' faith in them to be shaken.

A vicious cycle of those types of relationships, perpetuated by my constant feeling of unworthiness were never going to produce the desired ending. The men I attached myself to were incapable of loving me or even liking me in a whole and healthy way. They had nothing to give, and I judged my worthiness on how well I could get them to show love and concern in the relationships.

So, when I didn't get what I wanted I began to tell myself that I was the problem. If I claimed to be the problem, then I could craft the solution—never realizing I could have never been enough for those men because I was not their issue. The more they pulled away, the harder I fought and blamed myself. Their inability to form emotional attachments had nothing to do with me. Eventually, I had to identify why I continued to desire that type of man.

I wasn't able to take any accountability in those

situations. I tried to be tough—I acted calloused and cold in order to protect my heart. I wanted to be like the people who seemed to go through difficult times without any emotional response. I thought, "Who cares if the man I liked didn't like me? Not me!" I worked so hard to be equally as evasive and unbothered. Looking back, I realize that all I truly wanted to be was *numb*. It took a lot more living for me to realize that even the people who pretended to be numb, were indeed feeling something. They simply mastered the art of masking their emotions.

The reason the cold and calloused act didn't work for me is because my nature is the antithesis of that—my caring temperament is one of my greatest strengths. My Higher Power designed me to be a woman led by her heart—so even when I thought I was protecting myself by being tough and thick-skinned, I was heartbroken because I wasn't being me.

When I learned all these things about myself, I had to find a way to intertwine all the pieces of Tracey to match my true identity. Through prayer, meditation, reflection, and many tears I discovered that I was seeking my authentic self. I wasn't even aware that authenticity was what I desired or needed but through my journey of hurt

and pain, coupled with my education and personal awareness, it became abundantly clear. I wanted to be at peace with all the details that made me, *me*. I needed to know the difference between feelings and emotions, energies and intelligence. They were all a part of a Higher Power's perfect plan for who I was destined to be. I had to recognize the woman I was becoming was capable of a happiness and joy beyond what I thought was imaginable if I simply let go and put trust in my journey!

One definition of authentic is "worthy of acceptance or belief as conforming to or based on fact." This rang so true; I discovered I was worthy simply because I exist—because I was formed in a Higher Power's image. I was fashioned exactly the way I was supposed to be. My sensitivity, my heart, my intelligence along with the wide nose and skinny legs are just what was ordered when I was created. I had to own all the things that made me—well, me.

Another aspect of authenticity highlighted in the dictionary speaks to being "true to one's own personality, spirit or character." These definitions operate hand in hand. Not only must we accept ourselves as worthy, but we must accept the traits, characteristics, quirks, and faults that become the essence of who we are. Accepting our character traits is necessary for the way we live our lives and instrumental in presenting our best self to the world. Our complete self-acceptance can also assist others in becoming who they are meant to be. When we consider the best or worst of who we are, we must know that our beliefs about self and our character traits influence, teach, and shape the people in our lives. Oftentimes, our self-awareness may impact the way people see the world. How wonderful to know there's a Higher Power that uses each and every opportunity to stretch us, teach us, and show us love.

As I gained wisdom from certain lessons and began to identify my authentic self, I realized I no longer needed acceptance from anyone else. On good days and bad, I knew I was exactly where I was supposed to be. The truth is, life will have some incredibly inspiring and awesome moments and every now and then, tests will come. In the challenging moments it's so important that I (and you) remember, *this too shall pass*. The trials are a part of life's journey, and I will be molded and changed by them. As I continue to grow, I take every opportunity to learn new things, love on others, and be supportive as I become my best self. It is not always easy, but there is a weight lifted off

INTRODUCTION

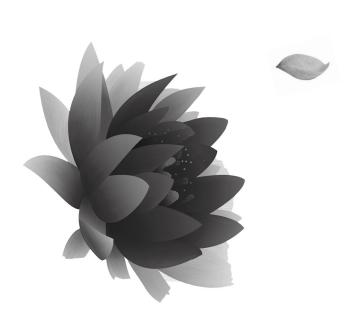
my shoulders knowing I don't have to suppress or repress the core of who I am.

I offer "The Art of Being Authentic" as a way to share my journey and touch the hearts of those who may be feeling the same way I felt and still feel at times. This book consists of nine principles I learned on my journey to self-acceptance, self-respect, and self-love. Not "self-ish" in a way that seeks to take from others but in a selfless way that enables us to teach boundaries and accept healthy love and relationships. I hope it resonates deeply with you.



PRINCIPLE 2

Uncompromising



Tracey's Truism

"Establish your power position in every circumstance knowing it could result in walking away from what doesn't suit you."

hen I think of being uncompromising in my beliefs, my thoughts drift back to an incident that occurred in New York during the eighties. A fifteen-year-old named Tawana Brawley accused six white men of kidnapping and raping her. The alleged details of the crime were horrific—especially because there were several other racially-charged incidents that took place in New York around that same time. A little-known trio that consisted of Al

Sharpton, Alton Maddox, and C. Vernon Mason held rallies in Brooklyn to address the incidents. I recall journeying to Brooklyn with my dad many Saturday mornings to participate in the rallies to stand in solidarity, not only for Ms. Brawley, but also for the things we perceived as attacks on the black community.

As a young, impressionable twenty-one-yearold woman, I remember feeling as if I *had* to be a part of this. I felt I had to stand for something I believed in, and I was not living if there was not a cause I was willing to die for. Granted, I was not Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., but as Tracey I could take a stand for something meaningful and make sacrifices to uphold certain principles.

Ms. Brawley's case was dismissed as a hoax and the accused were exonerated. Her then-boy-friend allegedly told officials that Tawana staged the whole thing to avoid punishment for running away, but for four days? As a young black woman, it was difficult for me to believe that Tawana concocted a story of assault to escape punishment at home. Who would put themselves in a garbage bag and cover their own body with feces? Was her boyfriend paid or threatened to corroborate that story in order to validate the narrative that young black women were "fast" and out of control? Were

people under the impression that law enforcement could never assault or victimize women in marginalized communities?

Where America's justice system is concerned, increased negative outcomes for minorities in the courtroom have proven that black women are often left defenseless against some members of law enforcement—just as enslaved women were often defenseless after they were raped by their masters. I felt heartbroken when the grand jury refused to bring charges for Ms. Brawley. Unfortunately, the judgment of that case served as a confirmation to me that my life and the lives of black women and girls were not valued. That experience set in motion underlying thoughts that justice was not possible—especially if it meant going against "the system."

Thirty-three years later, I know that what I believed about the system is indeed true; justice isn't always blind or possible for black Americans. Seeing countless deaths of unarmed black men, women, and children and watching the Black Lives Matter movement become politicized as members of the government make a concerted effort to weaponize the police, further validate the feeling that the system is working exactly as it was intended to. The 2020 revival of certain concepts

remind me that the time I've spent amongst people who share the same concern for the black community has shaped my ability to understand and conceive character, integrity, and principles in both myself and in others.



Establish Your Belief System

Our belief system comes directly from what we were taught, our outside influences, and the powerful voice of our creator. Oftentimes we deem that voice small in order to do what makes us comfortable as opposed to what may be best for us.

At the beginning of establishing our beliefs, we might find that our belief system aligns with what our parents think and expect from us. As we move from childhood to adulthood, we naturally begin to challenge those beliefs. Families who understand the power of freewill encourage children to explore different concepts and adopt beliefs that are hybrids of what they were taught and what they may learn on their own journey.

Though our initial beliefs are strongly based on our family origin, what we learn from our outside influences can play an integral role in who we become as well. From the time we develop our first friendships, we become intrigued by the thoughts of others. These influences can align, conflict, or remain neutral when it comes to our base beliefs. Ideas that align with our core belief system act as a confirmation for what we already know and believe. The beliefs that conflict can be the polar opposite of what we think we know and propel us into deeper thought and investigation. The neutral ideas don't influence us either way and are often new information that we glean from our circle.

Social media is a newer phenomenon that has had a major impact on our belief systems and the way we feel about ourselves. Social media has added to the preexisting amount of pressure to be something or someone we're not; it often leaves us feeling more anxious and judged by external forces.

When we're influenced by the voice of our creator or the universe, there is often a blueprint to define the straight and narrow. People who share similar beliefs and morals find a space for fellowship and accountability to define expectations—expectations can be easier to manage within a circle of like-minded individuals.

When we're living authentically, we become uncomfortable doing things that don't fall in line with our values or that compromise our principles. Establishing a belief system is a way to filter out things that don't align with our values. Most importantly, as we grow, we begin to refine our beliefs through encouragement, experiences, and lessons that continually impact our lives.



Build Your Foundation

A solid foundation helps us make well-informed decisions. When we understand our values, principles, and beliefs we position ourselves to better evaluate circumstances and make appropriate decisions for our lives. Establishing these firm boundaries often makes decision-making easier because a lot of the guess work is removed when faced with a difficult situation. Values, principles, and beliefs that become part of our foundation can be quickly placed into action when needed with little or no delay.



Standing Firm on Shaky Ground

Being uncompromising is not a lack of consideration to the desires and needs of others. This principle is not an opportunity to be rigid and hostile with those around us. It simply means relying on personal standards that allow us to live life according to our faith, values, principles, and beliefs. It's having the courage to walk through life confidently and comfortably with the choices we make for our lives regardless of who agrees. It's resisting the urge to perform in order to fit in. What we believe will oftentimes be called into question. In real life it can look like ending toxic relationships even if it means we might have to be alone for a season. It may look like standing up for human rights even if the struggle doesn't directly impact us. Know that this questioning allows you to continue to revisit and test the strength of your values.





INFLUENCES

List some of the things in your life that make

up your principles, beliefs, and values. Can you identify what influences them?

10880
100





EXPERIENCES

Share a time when you were forced to be

uncompromising in your life and what you learned from this experience.

 1040
 700

REFLECTION



IMPACT

How do your principles, beliefs, and values impact your quest for authenticity?

 1040
 700

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tracey R. Cobb is a therapist, author, life coach, and relationship strategist who is also lovingly known as "Therapist Tracey". Her background has given her keen insight into the self-help and awareness arena, mostly about relationships and dating, and has driven her passion to help people live with intention and authenticity.



Through her stories,

Tracey hopes her readers will find that it is a beautiful thing to seek their authentic selves and let go of the notion of having to perform or meet the expectations of others to be valuable or worthy. She wants her readers to love the idea of learning who they are and stepping unapologetically into the space they occupy on this earth.

Tracey lives just North of Atlanta, Georgia, where she loves the Black culture, the proximity to civil rights and her history, the beautiful weather, and the family-centered community where she raised her children. *The Art of Being Authentic* is her debut non-fiction book.