

THE ART OF BEING AUTHENTIC

NINE PRINCIPLES TO LIVING AUTHENTICALLY YOU!



Tracey R. Cobb LPC, NCC, CMFT

THE ART OF BEING **AUTHENTIC**

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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.

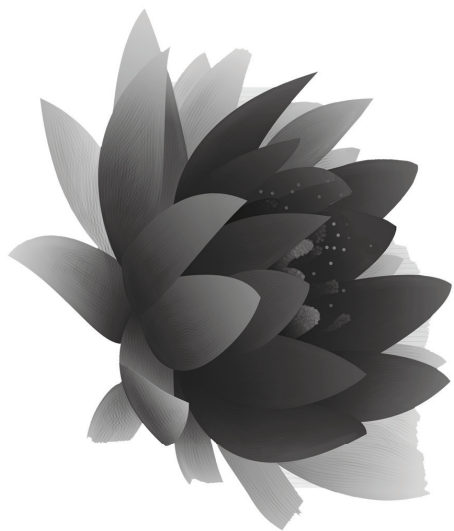
Love never fails. 1 Corinthians 13:8



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LIVING AUTHENTICALLY

YOU AND THE LOTUS FLOWER

I 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.

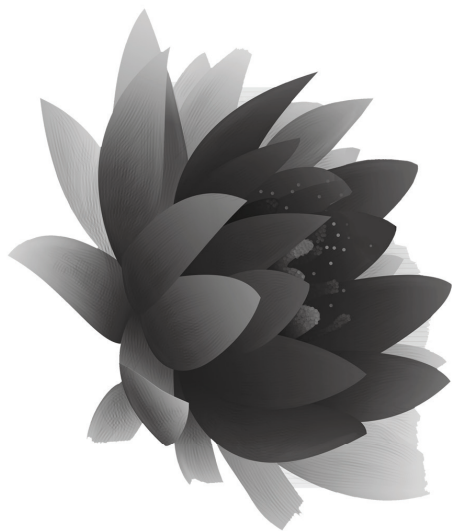
Therapists often focus on maladaptive thoughts and behaviors to help people overcome being stuck in the past. In order for me to truly assist someone's process of moving forward, I offer a safe, therapeutic space, empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard.

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





Tracey's Truism

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

This 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 young-adult 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

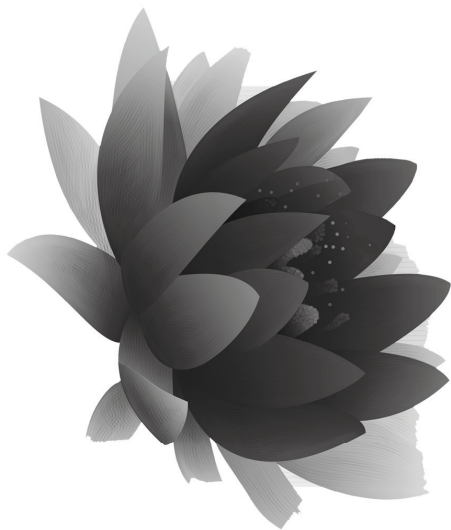
my shoulders knowing I don't have to suppress or repress the core of who I am.

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 3

T RUSTING YOU,
WITH Y OURSELF





Tracey's Truism

"Learning to trust yourself through it all is the first step to loving yourself unconditionally."

My friend London and I have a running joke about our different approaches to find love. Finding love, we joke, is like waiting for a bus. We laugh that she is the one hiding inside the house peeking out the door as she looks for the bus—timid and unsure. Whereas I am running full speed ahead, running over people in excitement to get to the bus—so much that I am willing to make mistakes and even chance heartbreak in order to catch that bus.

When I think about my excitement and comfortability about that bus (*love*), it's because I trust myself and the choices I make. I'm not reckless, but I have enough confidence and faith to know that even if love doesn't work out, I'll be okay and I'll learn something wonderful from each experience.



Believe You Are Capable

We have everything within us to take care of our own hearts from a physical and emotional standpoint. Our thoughts are powerful and whether good or bad, they manifest in our lives. If we fail to believe or have faith in ourselves, negative thoughts end up becoming self-fulfilling prophecies. We must work to be conscious of the thoughts we have. Is the glass half-empty or half-full?

How we answer that simple question speaks volumes about the way we view the world and ourselves. I know we sometimes have a need to see the glass as half-empty in order to protect our hearts from hurt and disappointment, but I want to encourage each person reading this to see the

glass as being half-full, believe in the good, and have faith during the challenges—only then will we begin to experience the joy of trusting ourselves and a Higher Power.



Ask Yourself Questions

Ask yourself: What do I want in my life? I encourage you to dream big, the more expansive the dream, the more room you have to maneuver and pivot to turn that dream into a reality. Additional questions to ask are: Is this the right choice for me? Is this dream really my own? Why do I want this? How do I make my dreams a reality? You may inevitably encounter some ideas that challenge your dreams, don't disregard those. Try to analyze those ideas in order to indicate whether there is a lesson or take away—see if there is any value in the thoughts that seek to protect you or cause you to think deeper. There are two categories these ideas fall into: facts that need to be considered or fears that can be let go. Once you've determined where these counteracting thoughts belong, I encourage you to maneuver accordingly.

One effective way to do this is by using the power of previous experience to build self-confidence.

You have a lifetime worth of experiences you can draw from. Take a moment and try to remember a time when you made a decision that worked out well: What thought processes did you use to make that successful decision? Did you seek out extra information? Did you consult with others? What did it feel like when you were in the midst of those choices? Asking these questions can help raise your confidence, unearth decisions, and anchor the answers you are looking for.

Authenticity comes from making decisions that are good for you. Many of us often make decisions based on what others do, what others expect, or how we want them to perceive us. When we are honest about who we are and why we do certain things, authenticity will become a natural part of who we are.



Soothe Yourself With Compassion

When things are going wrong for us or we feel under or overwhelmed, we often default to negative

self-talk or “stinking thinking.” Negative self-talk is a distortion of thought with no basis in fact. These distortions are defense mechanisms that creep into our minds to reinforce negative feelings that we have about ourselves and undermine our self-perceived value. Negative self-talk sounds like “*I’ll never find anyone to love me*” after an unwanted breakup, or “*I’m so stupid, I’ll never get a promotion*” after making a mistake at work. It often feels better to be self-deprecating in preparation for disappointment, instead of looking for the facts in a situation.

We beat ourselves up as an unintended punishment when we should be practicing self-compassion, which is the simple act of offering kindness to ourselves in the same manner that we do with others. Self-compassion calls for us to recognize when we are experiencing difficulty and need to extend grace and kindness to ourselves. It’s important to remember that everyone struggles at times, it’s part of the human experience. We should not be afraid to express gentleness to ourselves when life gets tough. The practice of self-compassion sets the stage for trusting ourselves.

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CHALLENGES

What hurdle keeps you from trusting yourself?

[illegible]

[illegible]

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.