

THE ART OF BEING AUTHENTIC

NINE PRINCIPLES TO LIVING AUTHENTICALLY YOU!



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.

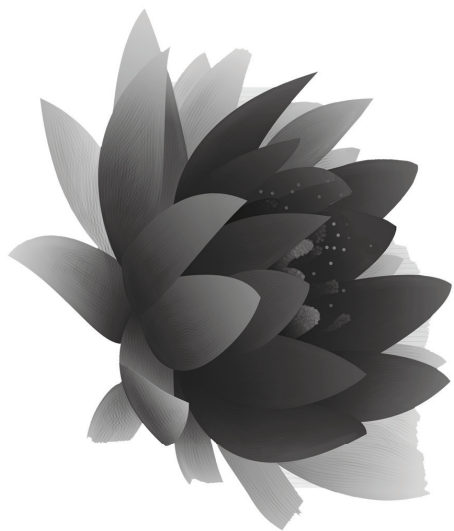
Love never fails. 1 Corinthians 13:8



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LIVING AUTHENTICALLY

YOU AND THE LOTUS FLOWER

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.

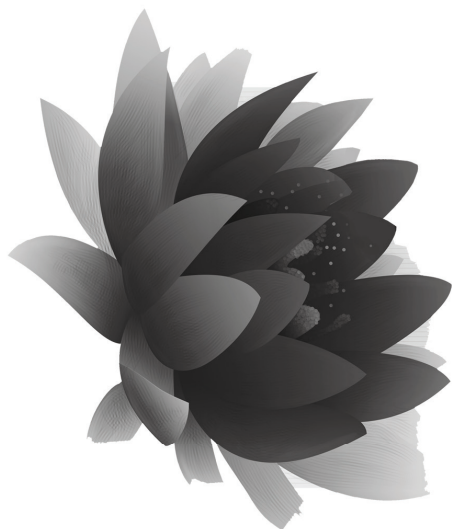
Therapists often focus on maladaptive thoughts and behaviors to help people overcome being stuck in the past. In order for me to truly assist someone's process of moving forward, I offer a safe, therapeutic space, empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard.

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

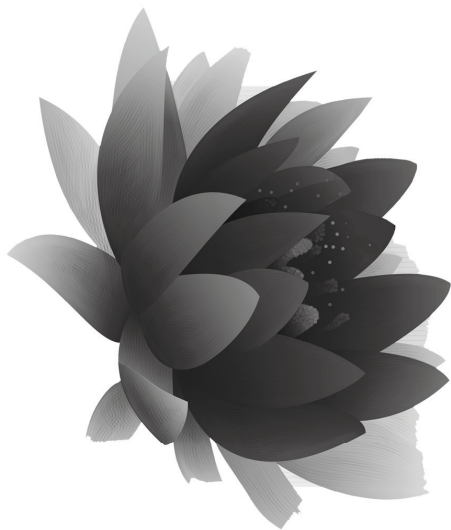
my shoulders knowing I don't have to suppress or repress the core of who I am.

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 4

HAPPY WITH WHO YOU ARE
AS YOU **D**ISCOVER YOURSELF





Tracey's Truism

*"It is simple, happiness will find you
if you let it."*

I once found myself desperate to be in a relationship with a man I met. I was smitten and absolutely certain he was the one for me. I told all my friends that he was going to be my husband just two short weeks after we'd connected. He had no idea I was so heavily invested in him or that I'd already envisioned us at the altar. I was so focused on my own desires, I didn't see the friendship for what it really was. Imagine my surprise when this man asked me to allow him to date me and to relinquish control. I couldn't

understand his wanting to take it slow because I already knew we were perfect for one another.

As I look back, it's clear I was misguided on so many levels! I could not define the dynamics of a relationship involving another free-willed human being. Recognizing my behavior in this situation was painful, but insightful. I got to see myself in the true light of who I am which is a fierce, unapologetically committed woman who has controlling tendencies, if I am not careful. Once I uncovered and accepted those inclinations, I had to figure out how to live with them without being angry, bitter, or self-depreciating. Acknowledging my personality traits led to insight, which helped me transform into the woman I am today. I am strong and joyful because I love, honor, and accept my authentic self.



Recognize the Value in Each Step of This Journey

As we maneuver through life, we can become discouraged waiting for new milestones to

materialize. Whether it's anticipating graduation, seeking new employment, preparing for the birth of a child, or even finding our soul mates, we are all in our own versions of waiting. When our timelines for personal goals are not met, we might begin to question ourselves and the validity of our dreams.

We can also be influenced by seeing the success other people have on social media. Watching another person's highlight reel creates an unnecessary internal competition with someone else when we should be using that energy to be laser-focused on our own goals and dreams. The pressure to be like others can feel overwhelming if we don't believe in and value ourselves and what *we* bring to the table. When we hear that nagging voice of comparison, we must cast it out and work to see the value in who we really are.

You must ask yourself, should I focus on my journey or an individual destination? The journey enlightens us, teaches us new concepts, and introduces us to evolved versions of ourselves. Our journeys also serve as a guide that introduces us to skills that we weren't aware we possessed. A part of the journey is learning through the disappointments, missteps, and miscues. We have to be open to the fact that peaks and valleys are

natural parts of life, invaluable to our transformation. Frustration comes when we only focus on the end result or someone else's success instead of taking the time to appreciate each step in our own journeys.

If at any time the destination feels out of reach, we must revisit our goals, and then we must activate endurance and resilience. Our plans may be void of winding roads, but real life includes twists, turns, detours, and delays. When we make peace with this reality, we become more flexible in our thoughts and actions—with our vision cleared to see the bigger picture. What's more important than the end result is the impact our steadfastness has in our own lives and the lives of others.



Acknowledge the Present

Once you have resolved to improve your life, you will inevitably find things about yourself that you desire to change. Behaviors and thoughts that worked well in the past will no longer be congruent with the person you are becoming. The process of change can be both exhilarating and frightening.

We will all have days where we are motivated and empowered by our insights and desires to change. On other days, our journeys may be threatened by the fears, uncertainties, and self-doubts that attempt to derail the whole process, but we must keep going!

Life will always present us with challenges, no matter how we try to avoid them. There will come a time when we face our biggest fears, and those fears may break our hearts. When we're young, change can be challenging and difficult to accept, but as we get older and gain wisdom we learn to accept the fact that change is the only constant in life.

One of the hardest things to accept is that some things are just not meant to be no matter how much we may desire them. That man I thought I could will into being my husband didn't cooperate, and things did not work out. When I look back on the relationship, I realize he was far from being "the one", and I wasn't anywhere near ready because I didn't know that love wasn't about getting what I wanted just because I wanted it. Though I was disappointed and hurt, I know that chapter ended the way it was destined to. When things don't work we have to reconcile that and move forward. The only choice we have is to

look into our hearts to find gratitude for life and take the necessary steps to navigate through the changes.

And we may even have a desire to have that old thing back, and the yearning to revert to what is familiar is completely normal. How we handled situations in the past is often a knee-jerk reaction that requires little thought and never stretches us beyond our comfort zones. It's imperative to acknowledge that we are all a work in progress, that change takes time, and that we are right where we are supposed to be. Adjusting our expectations will assist us in moving toward the direction of change when challenges arise.



Celebrate the Small Accomplishments

It's important to take some time each day to practice gratitude for the simple things in life. Things like the ability to hear good music, fellowshiping with friends or having toilet paper during a pandemic, are gifts that we should cherish. It's not always easy to look at our lives and be content with things as they are, but possessing this ability is

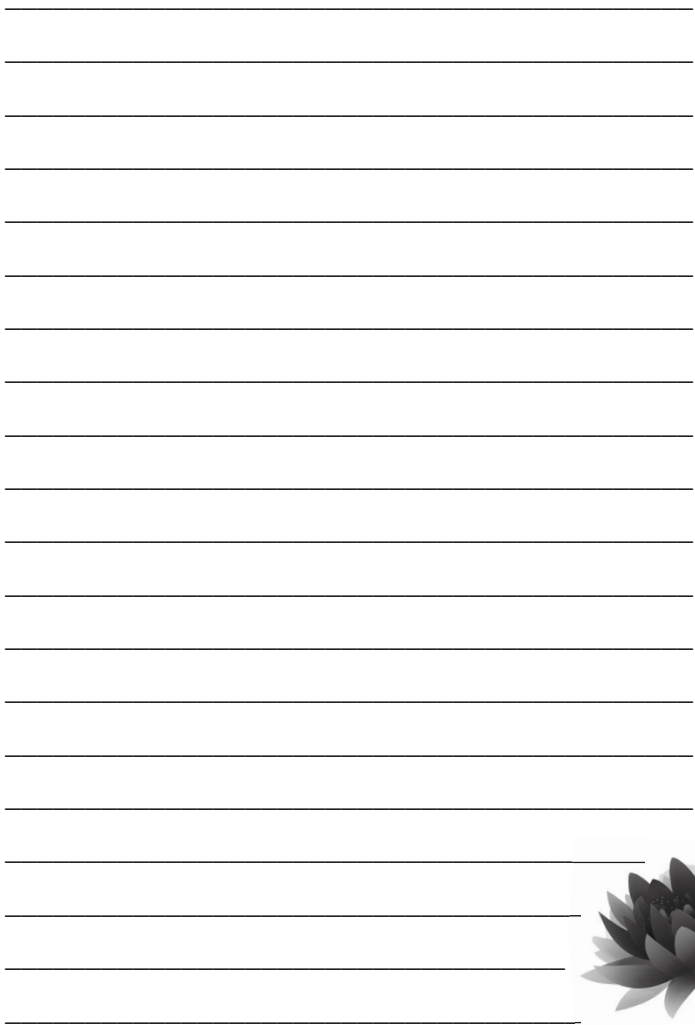
priceless. An attitude of gratitude goes a long way toward enhancing our joy and opens the door to greater gifts and blessings.

As we work to redefine ourselves and our lives, the ability to be self-compassionate and to forgive our mistakes will relieve the pressure to be perfect. Remember to celebrate good choices and jobs well done. Let us all learn to applaud our own efforts and rejoice in our happiness—fueled by our desires to see life's beauty and majesty embedded in the spirit of who we are.



What traits are you uncovering in yourself that help you recognize the essence of who you are?

[illegible]



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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.