

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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First Edition



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.

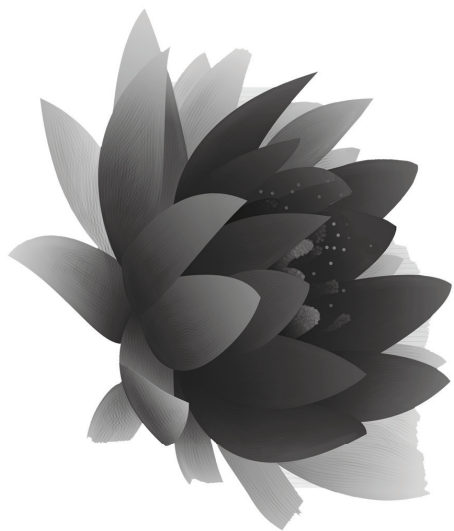
Love never fails. 1 Corinthians 13:8



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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.

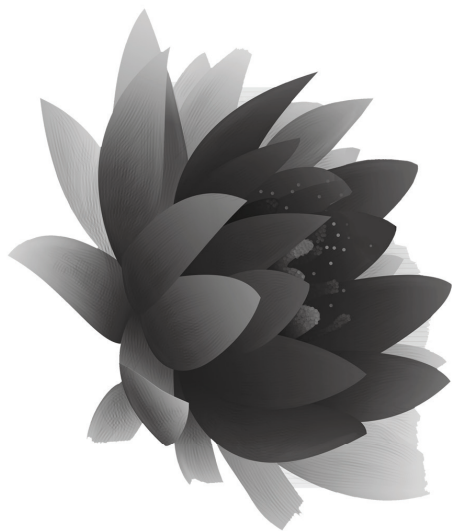
Therapists often focus on maladaptive thoughts and behaviors to help people overcome being stuck in the past. In order for me to truly assist someone's process of moving forward, I offer a safe, therapeutic space, empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard.

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*.

I NTRODUCTION





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

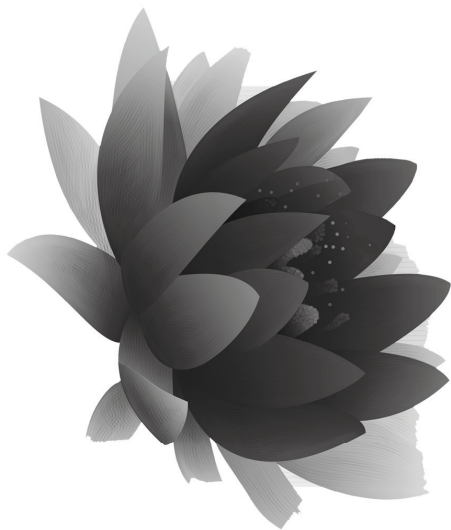
my shoulders knowing I don't have to suppress or repress the core of who I am.

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 5

EMPOWERING YOURSELF
THROUGH TRANSFORMATION





Tracey's Truism

"What others think of you is not an indictment or endorsement of you, it is simply their burden to bear."

After the birth of my son and being laid off, it took three years to find full-time, employment. Before that, I'd found part-time positions and temporary assignments but felt frustrated because I needed something that would give my children a sense of security.

I thought finding full-time, permanent employment would ease my worries, but I was wrong. That job didn't offer me permanence or security,

and five years later I was in the same position—chosen for another layoff.

I was angry, scared, and disappointed because I gave as much as I could to a very toxic work environment. America was in the midst of a recession, and I had to figure out what my next step would be as the sole provider for my family—but there was a difference this time. The second time around, I'd decided to return to school a year prior to being laid off to complete my bachelor's degree. I hoped that earning my bachelor's degree would help me move up the ladder with the employer I was laid off from.

While at that job I had an *aha* moment while speaking with one of the recruiters. I shared that I was in the process of getting my degree and was looking forward to new opportunities. She told me she didn't believe I would ever get the opportunities that a bachelor's degree could've offered me with that company. She believed they would never see me in any position other than the one I always had with them.

While I appreciated her candor, that insider tip was both heartbreaking and liberating. It served as a parable for how to deal with the world and let me know that I don't have any control of what others do or even how they treat me. I can

only control my response to what others do. That experience taught me to be honest with myself and begin my search for a career opportunity instead of a job. I wanted my diploma in hopes that a company would validate me with a larger salary when the reality was I felt deeply unhappy because I wasn't using my skills and abilities in a way that served others or fed my spirit.

I knew I had to continue my education, even though it seemed like an uphill battle. During that time, I viewed things from the perspective of a fear-filled and unworthy single mother. I sometimes felt that way about myself, but deep down I wanted something different, so I knew I had to do something different. I initially chose a traditional brick and mortar university, but I achieved success more quickly with a prominent online university. My non-traditional educational experience helped me to step outside of the box and use all my resources to meet business and personal goals.

The success of receiving my bachelor's degree propelled me forward, enabling me to believe I could live my dream of working to help people manage love and relationships. I was so excited about achieving that milestone that I dared to dream again, and I enrolled in graduate school to

pursue a master's degree in counseling, specifically in marriage and family therapy. After that seven-year journey, I graduated and each subsequent accomplishment has helped me to dream bigger and reach for higher heights.



There's No Quick Fix for Change

If I could tell young adults one thing, it would be that change is neither quick nor easy. Before we can act on making a personal transformation, we should know that the seed or “idea” for change has already been planted.

Contrary to what most of us believe, change doesn't happen overnight—especially positive change. Once a seed is planted, we then compile the perfunctory checklists filled with reasons we think we're incapable of change. If we are open, we can move past thinking we're incapable to realizing that positive change is within our reach, and there is no timeline for those negative mind tricks. I completed both my degrees and still spent three years working outside of the field of

counseling, partially because of licensing challenges, but mostly because I was afraid.

I was afraid of change and failure. I understood the principles of authenticity and transformation, but I had to learn how to hold space for fear. I began to understand that fear was and is no reason to stop, it's just a part of the process. Fear often rears its ugly head when I try something new. For many of us fear is one of the many hurdles to change, and it may take several false starts to eradicate fear altogether. I believe the most important antidote to fear is compassion and the ability to recognize what fear is capable of. Fear may cause temporary suffering, but we can hold positive space for ourselves. Grace allows us to see and feel the fear, but not to disparage ourselves because of it. If we change our relationship with fear, we can view it as an opportunity to shape and mold our lives. We will see ourselves growing stronger and more capable through our changes instead of as the antithesis of that.



You Don't Have to Be Invested in What Others Think

A lot of time and energy is wasted trying to live up to the standards and expectations of others. Our world seems to have turned into a place where we put more emphasis on what other people think rather than what we know to be true about ourselves. Social media and reality television have us believing we must compete with everyone for everything! The notion of competition is constantly reiterated as we continue to believe our worth is tied up in being accepted by a system that is completely separate from our realm of influence. Our core values shouldn't change based on what others think unless we are willing to compromise those values for them.

We have to ask ourselves whether the standards and expectations of others move our personal goals and quest for authenticity forward. If they don't, it's necessary to re-evaluate the reasons for seeking external validation. How we live our lives should be reflective of our own faith and values, and our faith and values will almost never perfectly resemble another person's. When we give more credence to what others think, we'll surely be disappointed with the outcomes. There

is a chance we unknowingly become pawns of these people as we attempt to figure out why we end up feeling used or hurt. More importantly, we may even find it impossible to hear our own voices or the voice of a Higher Power. During this process, our goals should be to examine our lives and make decisions about what we feel needs to be transformed based on our core values alone.



Find That Safe Space to Grow

Cultivating the space for change is an important part of empowering our lives. Transformation comes when there's an environment conducive to growth—a space that's free of judgment, criticism, or coercion. This follows the same tract of the beautiful lotus flower. The dark murky waters belie the ecosystem and nutrients that feed the amazing flower's growth, and our appointed spaces will behave in the same way for us. These spaces must fit our lives and lifestyle at the very moment of our evolution. For the sake of our own success, it's imperative we are invested in our personal development to satisfy no one other than

ourselves. Trying to change for someone else is futile, even if they benefit from our transformations. It's possible resentment toward others may set in if we don't act as the catalysts for our own change, and aren't the ones who receive the majority of the benefit.

Often, we will have to carve this space out for ourselves because even those who love us can sometimes find it difficult to understand our growth. Loved ones may believe our change is an attack on them or our relationship with them, and to that I say change anyway! The way we live our lives often gives others the courage to see themselves in a different light. Even if it doesn't change things for them, we owe it to ourselves to organically ascend to our rightful place in this world. Our evolution may illuminate things in them that they are unsure of and they are not quite ready to change. ***You must evolve anyway.*** We were put here to share this journey with many people that we love and value. There will come a day when we are summoned to step out of our comfort zones and complete the tasks we have been sent here to do. We can't let the fear or apathy of others deter us from our goals.

Let us surround ourselves with people who are working to enhance their own lives and recognize

the power of progress. These people will be excited about supporting our growth, will not be threatened by our enlightenment, and will give us the necessary space to evolve. They will also understand the value in our lifestyle modifications because they are likely experiencing similar changes.


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REFLECTION

SACRIFICES



*What are you willing to sacrifice in order to live
your dream?*

[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.