

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.

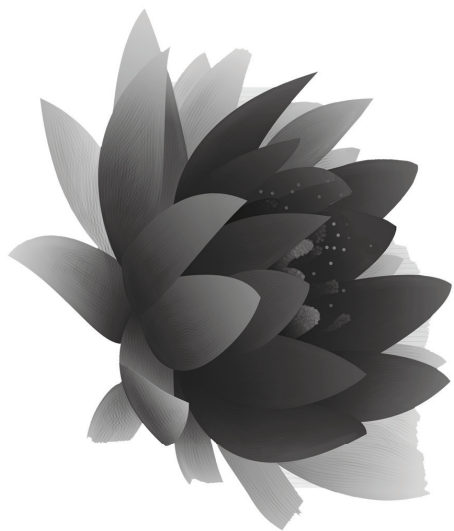
Love never fails. 1 Corinthians 13:8



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LIVING AUTHENTICALLY

YOU AND THE LOTUS FLOWER

Imagine 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.

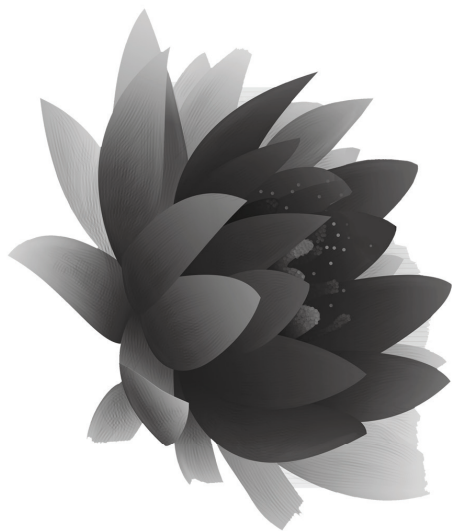
Therapists often focus on maladaptive thoughts and behaviors to help people overcome being stuck in the past. In order for me to truly assist someone's process of moving forward, I offer a safe, therapeutic space, empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard.

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

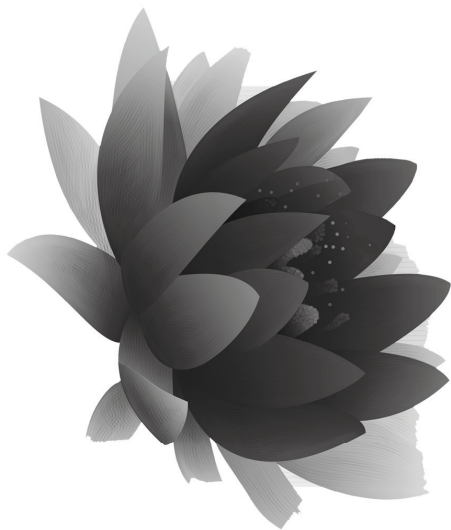
my shoulders knowing I don't have to suppress or repress the core of who I am.

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 6

NEW EXPERIENCES &
NEW RELATIONSHIPS





Tracey's Truism

*"I move forward to the new because
there is nothing behind me that I can
change."*

I remember how one of my closest friends, Janae, became an important part of my life back in 2007. Before our friendship, I had been fortunate to have many good relationships, even with the loss of my best friend in 2001—strong, fulfilling female bonds weren't elusive to me. Janae and I were colleagues and enjoyed an easy comfort with each other from the moment we met. We shared lunch hours, bantered about job and relationship challenges, issues with our children, and spent hours laughing

and having fun together. I do not know when or how it happened but before I knew it, we were best friends. One day I looked up and she was the person I was sharing with, crying with, laughing with, and dreaming with! She encouraged me and I encouraged her. Our sisterhood reached a depth where she was able to tell me things I needed to hear and vice versa. We were invested in each other's lives, only wanting what was best for each other.

Even though I was not seeking a new friendship or best friend, my being open made it all possible. Our sisterhood began so organically. We simply enjoyed each other. We placed no expectations on each other and had no agenda. As our friendship deepened, I recognized the importance of allowing things to happen naturally and authentically. I also realized that this is exactly how I want to experience my next romantic relationship. I won't define, chase, or label it. I want it to grow mutually and organically. I know that this is the best way to experience true love and grow it into a wonderful relationship.



Be Open

When I think about having new experiences or new relationships, I am struck by the overwhelming need to be open. Openness allows me to recognize my preconceived notions and possible biases, but my faith tells me that it is ok to believe in something new and different. In order to be open I must put my ego aside. I won't have all the answers and sometimes openness leads to vulnerability. Practicing openness can be difficult when it doesn't come naturally.

Many of us have had experiences that caused us to mistrust, to be guarded and safe. I believe that you can pick situations and people to go on the journey of openness with. In the beginning it may feel like we have to stretch to find our comfort zones but with faith and self-compassion we can make it through. Being open won't automatically get our needs met, but it will allow us to experience a connection with self, freedom to explore, and a chance to connect with others. Exposing ourselves to new experiences can open up a world of wonderful opportunities.

When we are challenged to be open there are some things we can do. We should begin by asking ourselves how comfortable we are with being

put in new spaces. Is there a reason we resist change or new things? Change is the thing that keeps life fresh in the same way I believe the Higher Power lets us know we are still alive. It forces us to reorganize our thinking and tap into our ingenuity.



Fear and Anxiety Are Normal

Let's face it, trying new things, meeting new people, or starting new relationships can be terrifying. The anxiety we may feel behind it is the physical manifestation of fear and uncertainty based on unknown future events—this can be especially true when past experiences trying new things turned out badly. Our minds may lead us to believe that negative outcomes are inevitable, but that's not necessarily true.

We have to hold space for positive outcomes at all times. There's just no way to guarantee what to expect or what the outcome will be. There is a segment of the population who will not move until they can be absolutely sure of the outcome. This feels deceptively safe and secure, giving the impression that they are in control. Control is an

illusion used to create a sense of power where people feel powerless, instead of acknowledging the lack of control. People become stuck in the cycle of analysis paralysis and it keeps them from the experiences and possibilities that can change their lives—while still having no real control over the situation.

Fearing the unknown and being anxious are natural responses to any type of change. The very thing we desire may seem to be just outside our reach if we are unable to reconcile our relationship with fear. We reconcile our relationship with fear by being honest about the fact that we are indeed experiencing fear. Next, we have to acknowledge that fear is affecting us and our ability to act. Finally, we must explore our worst fear by facing exactly how giving in to that fear will affect our lives.

Acknowledging what we're experiencing doesn't keep us safe from the things we worry about but neither does fear. Fear keeps us stuck in a pattern of projection with no chance of changing the story. We have to cultivate strength and utilize resources that will help us manage the challenges each of us will face in life. We must work to develop the faith that no matter what, everything will work out for our good—despite the overwhelming amounts of uncertainty. Experiencing challenges

builds our resilience and self-confidence, both of which only prepare us for success in future endeavors.



Even in the Old, There Is New

Even if we are not quite ready to break out the brand-new version of ourselves, we should think about how we can incorporate something novel into an old routine. Learning a new skill or hobby can keep us fresh and builds confidence. One example that comes to mind is from the women's interior decorating group I joined. There are women in the group who are decorating brand new homes with many rooms, and there are also women in the group who are taking a new look at their old spaces while creating beautifully designed, magnificent rooms in the space they've lived in for years. They are not deterred by not having brand new homes because they understand that old becomes new when there's a mindset shift. Taking small steps outside of our comfort zones can relieve some pressure and help us feel positive, focused, and motivated.



[illegible]

[illegible]



Share a time when you were open and willing to step outside of your comfort zone. How can that experience be used to help you reach new goals?

[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.