THE ART OF BEING AUTHENIC

NINE PRINCIPLES TO LIVING AUTHENTICALLY YOU!



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.

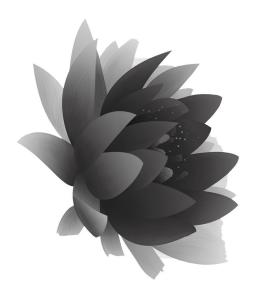
Love never fails. 1 Corinthians 13:8



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LIVING AUTHENTICALLY YOU AND THE LOTUS FLOWER

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.

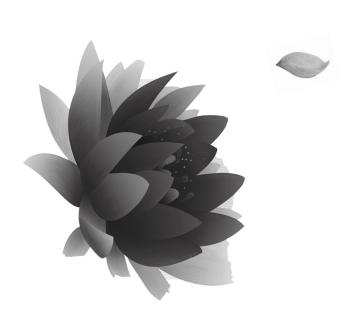
Therapists often focus on maladaptive thoughts and behaviors to help people overcome being stuck in the past. In order for me to truly assist someone's process of moving forward, I offer a safe, therapeutic space, empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard.

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

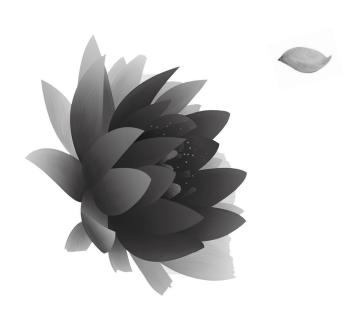
my shoulders knowing I don't have to suppress or repress the core of who I am.

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 7

THANKFUL FOR ALL YOUR EXPERIENCES—EVEN THE HARD ONES



Tracey's Truism

"Whenever I am afraid or experiencing uncertainty, I remind myself to seek gratitude and thankfulness."

have always considered myself thankful. I grew up in a great home where I felt safe, happy, and had few cares. I had friends, family, and an opportunity to have a good life. I felt as if I appreciated all the things I had been given, despite having some dreams that didn't materialize. Then, on May 11, 2011, I lost the first man I ever loved. My strong, spirited, principled daddy, Herbert Lee Cobb, died unexpectedly.

My father had been an athlete for as long as I could recall. I remember being a little girl watching him play baseball on Tuesdays and Sundays. At sixty-six years old, he was still playing tennis, walking miles, hitting golf balls, and dancing. In fact, on the very morning he died, he had been riding his bike. No one could have told me that my daddy wasn't going to live to be one-hundred-years old. He was an amazing man with a genuine heart who took care of the people he was given to. He took care of his wife, sisters, cousins, nieces, nephews, friends, and even strangers. My daddy took care of my brother, me, and, our children, and not just in the traditional sense. My daddy showed me how to be authentic, how to be responsible, how to operate with integrity, and how to work hard in everything I did—those gifts are truly priceless.

I will never forget a private moment my brother and I shared on the day our daddy died. I was sitting in a bedroom of my parents' house and my brother came in and sat on the bed with me. He reminded me that our father had done his job, that he had given us everything we needed to make it in this world and now it was time for us to make it happen. He didn't need to do anything else for us—he had masterfully completed his task.

That statement was so powerful to me, and I am sure it's what got me through the days and

months directly following his death. I was sad, shaken, afraid, and heartbroken but never angry. Rather than being consumed by anger over his death, I was grateful he did not have to go through this alone, he died in his home with my mother by his side. We lovingly made preparations for my daddy's internment, and I even felt strong enough to speak about my father at his life's celebration ceremony. I began to wonder why I had not fallen apart, why I wasn't inconsolable. When I thought about it, I realized it was because I was absolutely thankful for my daddy and the wonderful gift that my Higher Power gave me. I had my daddy for almost forty-five years, and I know without a shadow of a doubt that he loved me! When I look at so many children these days living without their fathers on a regular basis, I know I was blessed with something better than a winning million-dollar lottery ticket. Nothing could have been better than what I had with my daddy.

I am sad my daddy is no longer here on earth, but I am thankful to the Higher Power for blessing me with him. The Higher Power knew I needed Herbert Lee Cobb, and I will forever be thankful and grateful. I am honored to represent my father and the importance of his life by following

his example of operating in love and living by convictions.



Where Honor and Gratitude Collide

Being thankful when our lives are not disrupted by challenges is easy. It's when life hits us with unexpected trials and tribulations that it becomes difficult to be thankful. The death of a loved one, loss of a job, foreclosure, ending a relationship, or a global pandemic that encompasses all of these tragedies can make us feel immune to gratitude. Many of us have never experienced anything like COVID-19, and we don't have a playbook for recovery.

Unfortunately, a lot of us have lost so much and with no clear end in sight, it can be hard to be thankful. I believe the first step to managing these challenges is committing to honor the experiences of the people around us. I may not have the same experiences as you and mine may not be as traumatic or tragic, but we can all honor one another's experiences and hold space for one another to go through our own journey with grief.

Holding space entails sitting with a person who is in need of compassion, peace, and healing as they attempt to manage their pain and heartache.

Through our different circumstances we can find a common ground that allows us to be empathetic in times of crisis. As people begin to absorb the challenges and reconcile themselves with the truth, they might begin to understand that they can still be thankful in the midst of or after tragedy. Unfortunately, life will not let us escape the reality that we will all have unpleasant moments and encounter less-than-ideal circumstances.

We rejoice over the good things as they come to us, and we acknowledge our low moments by relying on the strength of our positive experiences while anticipating what the future holds. It's not always easy to be comfortable in that space but by remaining present, we open ourselves to experience life anew. Even when life experiences cause us pain, recognizing other's troubles can help us to be thankful for our lessons learned.



True Gratitude Opens Doors

There is humility in expressing gratitude for everything we have and all our experiences. There is power in freely conveying that appreciation. The Higher Power desires for us to show appreciation and to value the different circumstances of our lives. With each new situation there is an opportunity to grow. I find myself being thankful my dad made it home on that fateful day—before he had his heart attack. I shudder at the thought of what could have happened had he not made it home.

I am reminded of the outpouring love and support I received during those dark days. I recall my wonderful friend and mentor showing up at my mom's house after she had pizza delivered; we didn't know who ordered the pizza, and I definitely didn't expect her to come to the house. I'm reminded of walking into my dad's wake and seeing my old boss and his wife. Many of my friends, old and new, told wonderful stories about the impact my father had on their lives. Those gifts were priceless and comforted me at a time when my world had been turned upside down.

Not everyone is going to have the experience I had, and each of us will feel differently when it

comes to confronting the emotions behind losing a loved one and that's okay. Part of being authentic is simply being present, open, and honest about one's emotions—not trying to manage them. When I think about it, there are so many things to be grateful for even as we struggle with life. I understand it's not a simple practice and may take a lot of repetition before fully adapting to making gratitude a part of your daily spiritual life. I encourage you all to continue to be open, present, and self-compassionate as you work to center your hearts and minds toward an attitude of gratitude.



Appreciate the Journey

Reflection is key when discussing gratitude and showing appreciation. We have to look back and remember the challenges and the triumphs. Doing this has helped me evaluate how far I have come. I wasn't sure how I would make it in this world without my father, but by not allowing myself to be broken by his death, I learned to be resilient. Watching him operate in this world placed me

squarely in a position to manage my own affairs (well most of them). The biggest lesson I learned was to support others while also taking care of myself. I often wonder if he got the self-care part right for himself.

The journey with Herbert Cobb began with him and ends with me. The beauty of it all is that he gave me the best he had to offer and gave me the opportunity to combine his selfless gifts with the best I could be. Through his love and support, I am able to appreciate my transformation from unsteady baby steps to a powerfully sound gait. The Higher Power has abundantly blessed me, and I lovingly and freely practice gratitude.







GRATITUDE

Who/what are you grateful for and how have they/these changed your life?

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DIFFICULT EXPERIENCES

What experiences have you had that seemed difficult but helped you find gratitude?

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REFLECTION

RESISTANCE

Have you ever resisted being grateful? Explain why.

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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.