# 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.

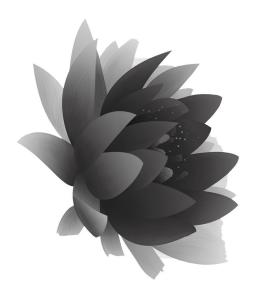
Love never fails. 1 Corinthians 13:8



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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.

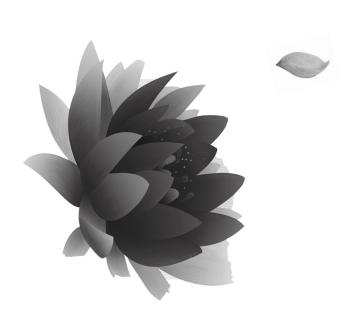
Therapists often focus on maladaptive thoughts and behaviors to help people overcome being stuck in the past. In order for me to truly assist someone's process of moving forward, I offer a safe, therapeutic space, empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard.

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

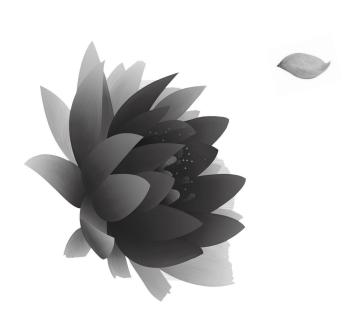
my shoulders knowing I don't have to suppress or repress the core of who I am.

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 9

# CLARITY



# Tracey's Truism

Be crystal clear. If you don't craft your own dreams, then you will become a prisoner of someone else's.

larity is having an insightful heart and spirit that incorporates the good, the bad, the challenges, and the triumphs of our journey while giving us the ability to stand in awe of our progress. Getting clear about who we are, the person we want to present to the world, and how we want that person to impact this world is a powerful aspect of authenticity. Know that no matter what comes up on this journey, we are all wonderfully made—not despite what's happened to us but because of what's happened.

Writing this book has been a journey of pleasure and pain. I began this process over eight years ago at a time when I was really struggling to cope with heartbreaking losses. I am well aware that losing my father changed every fiber of my being. If I am honest, I believe that his death made me stronger, more self-assured, and outspoken.

As I think back on the situation, I realize his passing required me to become a different woman because my safety net was gone and I had to figure out how to navigate this world in the driver's seat. I had been known to be independent, but deep down, I always knew my dad had my back. There was something comforting about knowing I had an honest, fair, supportive, integrous, and loving man in my life. I believe my dad is the reason I see the glass half full and try to see the best in people in most situations. With him on my team we could overcome any tough times or at least figure out a way to live through them. His presence allowed me to live in a world where my challenges were never bigger than my daddy.

I understand the changes I experienced after his death were part of the circle of my life, and I needed to have every experience in order to live a full life. His death brought clarity to my life in a way that propelled me to become the woman I was destined to be. The woman who can be loving and supportive, as well as impatient and stubborn. I also know that this woman, flaws and all, is necessary to change the world.

Sharing my innermost feelings, exposing my shortcomings, and baring my soul to the scrutiny of others is a nerve-racking experience. I am facing head-on those things that have had power over me and still show up in my struggles. I am choosing to confront insecurities, fears, and inadequacies all while electing to make sense of them in a space that allows others to experience them with me. This is the only way I know to remove the shame, fear, and uncertainty—to cast light on those things that cause me pain, but that also make me human. That is how I reclaim my power. I am grateful to have endured the lessons that taught me resilience and flexibility. The beauty of authenticity is that it rewards me for using traits that are organically a part of me: introspection. honesty, self-compassion, and love.



#### A Powerful Presence

I could not have known the amount of twists and turns my life would take when I began writing this book and for a long time, I didn't know how to ride the waves of change. As those changes hit my shore, I tried to stand stiff-legged and strong through the storms when there were times that I should have simply bent my knees and braced myself to ride the waves. I want to reiterate that I understand what I just described is not an easy thing to do, but riding the waves often conserves energy that will be better used on solid ground-taking the fight to a place where we can better engage. I want to ask each one of you: Do you know how powerful you are? Do you realize that your power is not only activated in fierce entanglements, but in quiet spaces that confirm the confidence in your choices? Can you imagine the power of your presence when you simply engage in understanding your value and worth? I can and it is in my spirit to utilize my power that way, in every single moment.

Each of us is wholly different and we possess an abundance of gifts and talents. The other people who are a part of my journey (I hope yours too) and what they bring to my life contribute to my life's richness and heartfelt joy. I clearly understand that they do not define me or my experiences. Through clarity, I have come to understand that in my life *I* affect *me*. I am equipped with free will, responsible for my own choices, and the biggest influence on my own behavior. I have nothing to prove to other people and am learning each day not to be overly concerned by their feelings in regard to how I live my life. I have chosen to enjoy the presence of others in my life while I also assume responsibility and choose to be aware of the footprints I leave in my wake.

This is where I must look at the person I present to the world and how I desire to feel in this world. My footprints are the manifestation of my gifts and talents, my work, my love, and how people feel after an encounter with me. What I weave through the lives of the people I touch is a powerful gift that keeps me humble and grateful to have been chosen to do this work.



### There is Still Work to Do

There is a sense of calm that comes with embracing authenticity. A feeling, an unspoken knowledge, an instinct that allows you to embrace the fact that life is an ever-evolving journey that develops through every single moment we live. Though we can't always directly impact the experiences we have, our perception, attitude, and reactions go a long way toward shaping our outcomes. We can learn to accept life on life's terms and change the things we can control—starting with our mindset. Our mind is a powerful tool and being intentional about manifesting different responses and commitment to new actions is really all it takes to become the change we desire. We are all a work in progress and even when things are not going as we hope we can take small steps toward change.

Be honest with yourself and evaluate the way you handle difficult times, uncomfortable situations, and cynicism. Do you engage with matching negative energy or hopelessness? I know that the negativity release valve feels good in the moment but it's wise to remember that steam still burns. Change your reactions by elevating your thoughts, your speech, your behavior, and your interactions.

Knowing that life is a continuous learning process gives you permission to let some things go and remain just as they are. The beauty of this reminder is that it allows you the opportunity to embrace the fact that there is more to come. Remember that you and I have, up to this point, survived one hundred percent of the challenges we have faced in our lives. Ask yourself how things might have been different if your mindset automatically skewed toward the positive. It may not have changed the outcomes but a mindset shift may have left you feeling positive energy and a lesson learned. I encourage you to do the work to move the needle toward positivity and watch the circumstances in your life change in your favor.



### Accept the Imperfections and Move On

Free yourself! Seeking perfection is like trying to catch time in the palm of your hands. It is impossible and adds nothing to your life but disappointment and frustration. Allow me to let you in on a little secret—no one is, ever has been, or ever will be perfect. Even your most famous

superstars are flawed. The precision and amazement you see is the result of meticulous planning and practice.

There is a part of us all that seeks perfection. I often wonder if it is part of human evolution, that the more we have the ability to conquer, the more obsessed we become with conquering. With that being said, there is a cost to obtaining perfection. It may cost us our joy, self-confidence, or creativity. We must find a way to balance the human desire for perfection and accepting our best selves. We must stop looking at our accomplishments and judging them based on the accomplishments of others. Loving and accepting ourselves as we are helps us view ourselves in a positive light.

It is ok to acknowledge compliments from others, but we must also remember how valuable we are whether we are bosses or still figuring out our next moves. We are better served doing our best, adjusting our expectations, and embracing our own humanity. It is ok to be exactly who you are, right now.







# INSIGHT

What is this journey revealing to you?


 1040
 700





## SELF - DETERMINATION

What would it take for you to live minimally influenced by others and almost completely defined by yourself?


10880
100

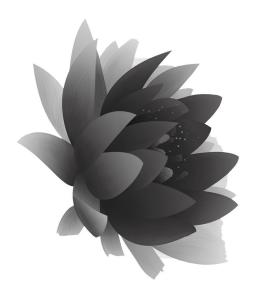




# **FEELINGS**

Describe the feelings you are experiencing during this transformation.


 1040
 700



# 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.