

# ‘A POSITIVE AND POWERFUL FORCE FOR GOOD’

WRITTEN BY T. MICHELLE MURPHY

If you’ve ever looked at your life and thought that something was lacking — or felt like you were stagnant, and simply playing a role while waiting for your real life to begin — then author and inspirational speaker Katrina McGhee, founder of Loving on Me, is prepared to help you change your path.

You might be surprised to learn that she can do it with no more than supportive words, an understanding hug (yes, including virtual hugs), and a *lot* of love. Because sometimes — especially for women making their way in a society that’s designed to make them feel undervalued — that’s exactly what we need to go back and look at our own lives with a fresh set of eyes: someone who believes in us and will support us along the way.

“Loving on Me was born [as] a cry for us to focus on our own self-worth — to learn how to love ourselves and know that we’re enough,” McGhee says, “and then to do what we love.”

Sound familiar?

The origins of McGhee’s self-empowerment are just as relatable: It began with a nervous breakdown.

“I had gone through a ‘life, interrupted’ moment that stops you in your tracks,” she says. “For me, it was a sudden job change that I wasn’t expecting. [I started] having severe anxiety attacks. I really felt like I was having a heart attack and a stroke at the same time. It forced me to take a time out and assess what I was doing.”

Part of that assessment involved starting Loving on Me, which began as a personal blog, back in 2012.

Reflecting on her life, McGhee realized that the stress that came from defining herself by her professional title was the real reason for her anxiety. That meant it was time for a dramatic change — not just in her career, but in the way she felt about and treated herself.

“What I really figured out,” she says, “is that I was trying to be General Manager of the Universe, and I had to stop trying to control everything and go back to trying to manage me.”

## Branching Out

Of course, it wouldn’t be a “change the world” moment if things just stopped there. Instead, her blog started taking off — resonating with young women who were struggling with the same psychological and self-esteem roadblocks that she was working to overcome.

“A funny thing happened, once I stopped trying to be profound and started being authentic,” McGhee recalls. “A lot of other women said, ‘Hey, that’s my story too!’”

She realized that a wider audience might benefit from hearing her story and how radically she was able to change her life once she simply gave herself permission to do so. Plus, they would have the added benefit of her example, empowerment, and encouragement along the way.

“I added some business elements to [the website], then wrote a book,” she explains. “This year I started an academy so that women could be inspired, equipped, and empowered to lead in every aspect of their life.”



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## BALANCING ACT

If you think Katrina McGhee's got it all figured out, she'll be the first to reassure you that, just like everyone else, she's still working on a few things: "I do a lot of public speaking, but I'm really an introverted extrovert. When I come offstage, I get the wiggles inside! I tell people that, and they don't believe that happens to me. I am much better onstage than I am sometimes in a room where I have to engage with other people. So I've had to work really hard to be who I am, to give myself that private space I need, but to still share enough of my life — especially on social media — so that people can get to know me. Trying to figure out that balance can be tough!"

Just like the self-reflection that started her journey, the LOM Academy was born from taking stock. This time, she had a community to help guide her: They were saying that they identified with her story so much that they were reading her book two, three times. That should sound like a good thing, but Katrina McGhee is anything but a woman who rests on her laurels.

"I started to say, 'What is missing?'" McGhee remembers thinking: "I know the book inspires them, but I want them to live the life they were created to live, too!" She says: "The academy became the place that I could equip women with the tools that they need to lead and succeed."

## Curly Confidence

How we look is intrinsically tied into how we feel about ourselves, so it's going to impact our ability to attain that success.

As a woman of color who wears her hair natural, it's no surprise that McGhee has a few words of wisdom to offer women who don't feel confident enough to show off their beautiful curls on their own terms — whether that's out with friends or in the workplace.

"You have to first believe that you look professional

with your curls," she says. "If you are questioning that yourself, it will come through in the way you carry yourself. So the first thing we have to do is learn to love our locks."

Loving your locks can come in any form that works, she assures: "I have nicknamed mine, by the way: 'Defiant!' That's because I have had to learn to love my curls — some days they curl going a certain way, another day the curls are tighter on one side. It goes through its stages, with the humidity and everything, but I have learned to see it as beautiful no matter how it looks."

That wasn't always the case: "My mother would spend hours on Saturday straightening it," she recalls. "In the South, well-groomed meant wearing your hair pressed and curled. You didn't wear your natural curls. So I didn't even understand that I had curly hair until I was an adult. I used to twist it every night so I'd have these little curls and fullness in the morning. Finally, I went to a stylist who said, 'What are you doing? You *have* curly hair — and it's beautiful!'"

McGhee says she hopes women will learn to "love themselves *for* themselves, inside and out," and remember that "our value and worth is in who we are and not what we do. And our looks are merely a manifestation of our beauty and brilliance from within. So embracing

your curls, learning to rock them with confidence, and being unafraid to buck the system that says 'they're not beautiful, they're not professional, they're not appropriate for the office,' to be confident enough in them to step out as we are and to slay it, to deliver excellence at every turn and redefine for other people what professional looks like — that's my hope."

## The Community

One of the things that sets McGhee apart from other inspirational speakers and life coaches — besides her fierce and fearless locks — is her ability to unite women and spark conversations.

"There's nothing like a circle of sisterhood to encourage and empower you," McGhee says. "I encourage every woman to not only seek out other women who are supportive of each other, but to be that for other women — because when you have people that believe in you, and who affirm your worth, it really matters."

An important part of *Loving on Me* is the community that's formed both on her website and on social media. Fans are called "LoveLights" — or, collectively (and fondly): "the Tribe."

LoveLights are thousands of women who are dedicated changemakers; they are united by the mantra: "Yes! I want to be a positive and powerful force for good." They're primarily united online, where they provide each other with that exact circle of sisterhood that McGhee prescribes. It's perfect for those who haven't found their go-to confidants in their day-to-day lives, where it's much harder to project confidence and extend trust. But taking the time to cultivate a worthy tribe is a perfectly normal part of the process, McGhee assures: "It takes time, and you have to figure it out. A lot of people who you think will be part of your tribe, who your story will resonate with the most, are really not the people that this dream that you have ultimately is designed to serve. It takes a while."

In the meantime, there's the Tribe: thousands of women helping to spread McGhee's message of self-empowerment, like beacons of love and light to guide the way for other wayward ships.

"It started as a blog and became a movement," she concludes.

The best part? It's easy to join that movement, and boost other women, in your everyday, McGhee says: Start by actively supporting women's causes, investing in women-owned businesses, and always speak life into your dreams.

## HAIR CARE

McGhee copes with her curls on their most obstinate days by giving her mane a little nickname: "Defiant." Here are a few tips that she offers to help you show your own locks some love:

1. Rock your look with confidence and authority.
2. Always love your locks, and "love on them."
3. Take care of your curls, and make sure they're well-groomed.

Plus, you could also try giving your hair a name — whatever works!



## What's Next?

"My passion right now is growing the academy," McGhee says, when looking at the road ahead. "And the goal for me is simple: I want to connect with as many women as I can who need the messages I have."

That includes adding a new book to her toolkit — *Be Bold, Be Brilliant, Be*

*You: Lessons from the C-Suite to Catapult Your Career*, releasing this month — and launching a 12-city tour that will not only promote the new publication but also give her the chance to speak with more of those women in need of a boost.

"I started a mission to help women love themselves and each other more, and I discovered that loving yourself means making the choices in your own best interest, being courageous enough to establish boundaries, going outside your comfort zone, and surrounding yourself with a supportive circle of friends who inspire you to aspire higher," McGhee shares. "But all of those are conscious choices."

Often, all it takes is knowing that the choice is theirs to make. Of the work still ahead, she says: "I believe there are millions of women with whom these words can resonate, and these tools will work for, and my only goal now is to connect with as many of them as possible."

Are you, or do you know, a curly girl who's changing the world? Running for office? Serving other people? Tell us at [changetheworld@readcurl.com](mailto:changetheworld@readcurl.com).