

Full text of creativity consultant Courtney Ferrell's talk titled "Girl Up: The Secrets to an Extraordinary Life" at TEDxRVA conference.

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### **TRANSCRIPT:**

Okay. I need a favor. I need all girls who are between the age of 17 and 24 to stand up. You got to go quickly. Don't feel like she won't know. I know you're here; so stand up tall. Stand up, let everyone see you.

And then yep, okay. So right... right there: do you mind... you, yeah. Would you come up on these stairs right here and just come onstage with me?

Okay. So I have spent the majority of my adult life trying to awaken the creative spirit in people and keep my own creative spirit entertained.

And 13 years ago, I married a lovely man named Wortie Ferrell, who spent the majority of his adult life in education, just helping young people become good people.

Come on, come on, come over here.

And so I have come to have this belief that the greatest untapped resource that society has.... in this chair right here... that society has, exists in girls like this. Exists in girls between 17 and 24, give or take, a few years.

And so today... what's your name?

*Girl: Tessa...*

Hold this right here. Tessa, who? There're lots of Tessas. Which one?

*Girl: Tessa Anderson*

Tessa Anderson. Okay. Today Tessa Anderson I wrote this TED talk for you, and only for you. The rest of these people get to listen but there's nothing more that I could do with my time today, more important than to make you feel as big and as valuable as you are.

So I'm going to tell you this story. First of all....

Okay. So I am a mother of three, I have two girls and a boy and my second little girl Roswell went to kindergarten for the first time this year. And I was going to be mother of the year and have her prepared.

So the night before I explained what was going to happen. I took her out in the yard and I got down on one knee and I picked up this acorn.

And I said Rosie, "This acorn believes that it is going to become a big oak tree. Even though it doesn't look like one now and it doesn't care what you think, or what I think or what any of these people think, it knows it inside. And that is **self-confidence: knowing that one day you're going to become something bigger than you are right now.**"

And I opened her little hand and I put it in there. And then I took her other hand and I put a kiss on it, like that.

Now close your little fingers around it and I said, "That is **LOVE**. That's the love of me and your father and your sister and your brother and your aunts and your uncles in your community and you are loved from the top of your head to the bottom of your toe. And with those two things, tomorrow you can get out of the car with your sister and walk with your shoulders back into school with no crying. You understand?"

And she said yes.

Every day you pack those two things. You pack your love and you pack your creative spirits.

The next day we get in the car. We drive; we open the door. She puts her little shoulders back seat. She has the acorn in one hand; she has the kiss in the other and she walks right into school.

And I'm so proud. I don't even cry; I'm so proud of myself really at this point, right?

And I get home and the phone rings and it's the school.

And I say, "Oh hi, is Rosie okay?"

And they say "Yes, Mrs. Farrell. She is. Kindergarten actually starts tomorrow."

So if any of you didn't get mother of the year last year because I had it locked up.

So I tell you that story, because **perfection is not a human quality**, and a lot of girls and a lot of women pretend like it is. It is not; let go of it. Don't even aspire to it. Just be good enough and show up with your self-confidence and show up with love.

So that's what I'm going to try and give you in the time that I have remaining.

All right. So I'm going to tell you another story.

So I live in Dallas, Texas. Are you cool right now?

*Girl: Yeah.*

You're good, okay. So I live in Dallas. This is water, I drink; if you're thirsty you can have some. I promise I'm very healthy right now.

Okay. So I live in Dallas, Texas. I moved there five years ago. I knew not a soul; not a soul. And after a year I'd finally cultivated like a couple friends and one of them was a very like big-time Dallas person. You know Dallas, that was like big hair, big, big, big and I... like I don't even wear makeup. This is just for today, right?

So she invited me to her birthday lunch and where all the other trendy, very trendy women were going to be. Andy Hardy told you I was like this on high heels, right? This is not my thing.

So I was excited... because I was going to meet trendy cool women.

And then I got up that day and I started digging in the garden and I lost track of time. And then I looked at my watch. It was only ten minutes to the lunch and I was dirty... really really dirt in my fingernails and like crazy hair and the whole thing.

And so I panicked. I didn't know what to do. I couldn't get ready.

So I went into my garage and I put on the gorilla suit and I grabbed a bunch of bananas. And I drove down to this really cool eating spot and there they all were, because I was a little bit late and they were there looking gorgeous with handbags and stuff.

And I walked up to this girl and I gave her the bananas and I stood there. And then I took my mask off and said, "Oh, she dressed up me in something completely different in Virginia."

Now I'm thirsty. I got to have some.

So I'm telling you that, because **you have to be authentically you**. Come

hell or high water, I don't care if everyone dresses up but that's not your thing, don't do it. And if it is, do it, right. Authentically you... and if you're going to be authentically you, you have to trust your gut in every situation.

ALSO READ: Say 'Yes' to Your Adventure: Matthew Trinetti (Full Transcript)

And here's the crazy part. We wait until we can intellectualize what our gut is telling us and we can explain it before we actually listen to our gut.

And what I'm telling you is **you have to listen to your gut right there even if it doesn't make sense**. If you feel like the moment would be better if you did something, go do it.

If you feel like you need to remove yourself from a situation, remove yourself. And in order to do that, you need resources. Every girl... every girl and especially you, tell me your name, again because I'm all excited I forgot.

Tessa. Tessa that's the name; you need mad money. You need mad money; that means if you're out with people and you get mad, you got money to get in there.

And you put mad money on you like underneath your bra, right? Like for me that's the only purpose for the bra, right?

And then like in your shoe, like you too, yeah like done the only purpose. So I put it there... okay this is yours. I'm giving this to you; it says mad money. You don't spend on anything yet right there, you don't spend it on anything... she's good; she's with me like except for to remove yourself from a situation or make a moment better right?

Okay. So to be confident you have to also know that you're loved. There's three kind of loves. There's **self-love**; there's **romantic love**; I'm going

there by the way just so that you know. And there's **community love**.

So the self-love is this: for some reason we as women are so hard on ourselves. We always talk about what we don't like about our body.

When I wake up in the morning, I look at myself in the mirror and I have this one thing I love about myself and it's the sparkle in my eye and it's always there no matter what. And I say "Hello beautiful!"

I say that because that I am, I am, right? And I have to tell myself that because the world is out to try and tell me that it's not true.

So you have to do the same thing. Go ahead try it; say it to yourself "Hello beautiful!"

*Girl: Hello beautiful.*

Hello beautiful! And you've got to mean it when you say it.

And the other thing is that you have to take other women along with you, you cannot see them as your rival; they are not your rival. You take them along with you.

The next kind of love is **romantic love**. And Grace and Lahti, another friend are in here. I already told them when I was... is a little risque but you need to know this: every guy you meet wants to sleep with you. It is not a compliment.

Look at that statue; see him. Do you know why he has his head down the way he's trying to take a nap with that other statue? That's all he wants to do and it is not a compliment. Don't think of it that way.

You have all of the physical cards in your hand. Everyone. And if you do and act like the heroines on television right now who sleep with someone

new every single week it will cause you emotional harm. It will.

You have to remember that your physical decisions are inextricably tied to your emotional well-being and people got to start saying it... all right.

If you ever are dating someone or fall in love with someone and they don't meet your needs or they treat you meanly or they make you feel less than you actually are, you have to break up with them, right away.

So like let's just say you're dating that guy right there, like he's cute. Look, he's hot, right? And then look but he's not giving you the time of day, I don't like that. You gotta break up with them, all right. You just say you're not meeting... don't talk to him, he's married. Ever, never... never a married guy.

Now look up, so that guy it's him, that's totally inappropriate turn around, this is inappropriate the way he's making suggestions to you right now. You don't like it and you want to break up, okay. So you've got to tell him you're not meeting my needs; this isn't working for me. It's over. It's over... is really important.

But I always forgot to say that. I would like break up and I would forget to say like that I was broken up, and I'd just go on; that's not good. There's like a lot of people watching this right now who are like this she did that and that's bad. Don't do that, okay. So tell him.

*Girl: It's over.*

That's good. Saying you're not meeting my needs. I want like you mean it. You're not meeting my needs.

*You're not meeting my needs.*

All the way up there. I feel abandoned.

*Really far away. It's just a lot...*

And it's over.

*It's over.*

Okay. Now, yes, good, it's over, it's gone. And don't... don't wait... don't wait until you're like is it really over; just it's over, it's done, you need other ones; just go, okay.

Here's the deal. Roleplay is really important. What are you going to do? What are you going to do? You get a party and someone offers you Molly and you're like you're going to take it, you're not going to take it.

You're not going to take it. You've got to practice saying what you're going to say, right. You're going out with a guy and he drinks too much and he wants to drive you home, what are going to say? You're going to say I'm not going to get in the car with you, You've got to make up some story about how you had a best friend who died in a car wreck who was drinking, so you're not going to go and then tell him later that that was completely lie, because you just fell awkward.

You want to go, you take your mad money out, what are you going to do?

You have to know these things in advance.

Okay and then the next and very important kind of love is **community love**. It's community love. I'm going to tell you this. I'm going to look out to the audience for a second. And that is that I was so lucky because I had a mentor.

ALSO READ: Staying Stuck or Moving Forward: Dr. Lani Nelson  
Zlupko (Transcript)



And the reason I had a mentor was several... I was lucky, I met Andy Stefanovich changed my life; he just changed my life because he took the time, he took the time to care about me when I was really young and silly and goofy and like putting jelly beans in my nose as a funny like that. I was a business person... doing... what are you doing like, that's really crazy stuff like that.

But he took the time to stop and give me advice and fine-tune me and stay with me, and even when I messed up make me feel bigger than I actually was. You have to find a mentor and I want you to turn around now and stand next to me for a second.

This is Tess and you right here are her mentors. And you all wrote your name and your contact information. I want you to rip it out right now and Tess was sitting like somewhere over there and you're going to pass that piece of paper there. Just do it quietly; don't make a ruckus. Just pass it up. You up there, drop them down. Don't be distracted. Just drop them down and pass them there.

In your chair, Tess, is going to be 1200 pieces of paper with people's names and numbers and what they're passionate about. Look at them. These are all for you and you can call... and there's some really important people in here.

You can call these people and you can say I want to be an apprentice for a day. I want to come... you know I want to go and if there's an architect Dan McNally, he's in here; he's an architect. You can be an architect for a day and see what that's like. He's awesome.

There're other people in here and they can take you under the wing and give you that and give you advice on everything from relationships to whatever you're working on. But I don't want just to be advice, I want her to be able to call you and tell you cool ideas.

I had a cool idea last year about putting messages in bottles for people who are landlocked. And so I started talking about it. I want to put messages in bottles, started doing, just putting messages in bottles and then I just leave them places so someone could have some surprise and delight.

And then I had this woman call me up and said I heard you the other day talking about messages in bottles. And my company thinks that's cool so we just ordered 2,000, and they'll be at your house.

And then I got this call from SMU from this teacher who works there who said my students really want to be involved in that. And I had thousands of students send in messages which I'd put in bottles and hid all over Dallas 2000 messages in bottles, all because I just talked about it and the world wanted to be a part of that.

And you all are doing something exciting and you got to tell Tess what you're doing. Tell her about all the exciting things that you're doing, so that Tess can be inspired by that. Tell her in the moment, maybe she'll say I want to be a part of that. I want to be like you. I want to raise up.

We don't mentor young girls and you know why because Tess looks polished, she doesn't look like she needs mentoring. She looks like she's got it all pulled together but she doesn't. She doesn't. She's a mess. It rhymes with Tess and she needs you. She really really needs you.

So you're going to call these people and by the way if I could name this talk something, I would call it **Girl Up**. And part of that would be to you, like Tess, girl up!

Yes, you know like break up with that guy and like take care of yourself and believe in yourself and bring other girls along and be self-confident. By God, girl up!

And it would be to you all to say hey there's another really cool girl coming up. So girl up; put your hand down. Pull her up. Find the other girls that stood up. You saw other girls in that age group, stand up again. Come on, do it stand up so that the community can see you, so that they can mentor you.

Thanks. Listen you stood up. Take some initiative toward the person next to you and say you're going to mentor me. You understand. I need it.

There is a plaque outside this building that was erected to honor the 34 VCU men and women and girls and boys who protested segregation outside Thalhimers.

In the last part of that plaque, some of you may have seen it today when you were eating lunch and it said something like this. I'm paraphrasing. *Let this plaque stand as a reminder that any individual can inspire others through thoughtful, peaceful action.*

Any individual can inspire others through thoughtful action.

And my purpose for being here today is this: I want this community to lift you up so that you can turn around and lift this community up.

And I'm going to walk off the stage now and they're going to applaud because it's the end. But the applause is not for me. It is for you. Good luck.

One thing I'll say is this: you are not an acorn, you are an oak tree. You are a tall powerful person in this community, in this very creative community. And it is everything for you to start now.

Don't wait until you're 40 with three kids and a job and a mortgage and a husband. You don't have any time to do it. Do it now while you got nothing else to do.

### **Resources for Further Reading:**

[Everything Happens for a Reason: And Other Lies I've Loved by Kate Bowler \(Transcript\)](#)

[The Difference Between Healthy and Unhealthy Love: Katie Hood \(Transcript\)](#)

[Full Transcript: Esther Perel on Modern Love and Relationships at SXSW 2018](#)

[How To Tell If Someone Truly Loves You: Femi Ogunjinmi \(Transcript\)](#)

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