

BEFORE YOU BUY THIS BOOK, TAKE YOUR REALITY CHECKUP!

Put a checkmark next to the statement that best describes you.

LIVING YOUR DREAM LIFE

- Financially independent with money in savings
- Volunteering to help those in need
- Scaling Mount Everest
- Thrilled you now fit into your skinny jeans
- In a loving relationship with your best friend
- Putting your hard-earned degree to use
- Traveling the world on your company's dime
- Living on your own
- Feeling included, appreciated, and inspired
- Confident of your direction and purpose

NOT WHERE YOU'D THOUGHT YOU'D BE

- Praying for 0 percent balance transfers
- Accepting free food at all times
- Staring at the walls of your cubicle
- Telling yourself you'll start that diet next week
- Dating losers who just aren't into you
- Wondering why you wasted so much time at school in the first place
- Working overtime without pay
- Living with twelve roommates
- Yeah, not so much
- Growing a tad bit disenchanting and purpose

MORE PRAISE FOR *MY REALITY CHECK BOUNCED!*

“Attention, twentysomethings! Jason Dorsey compellingly motivates proactive thought and action with very realistic, practical, illustrated strategies. An excellent contribution.”

—Stephen R. Covey, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*

“I’ve known Jason for six years, and in all six years I’ve seen him help people our age make life-changing decisions for the better. He is a real inspiration for our generation.”

—Kenan Thompson, actor and comedian, *Saturday Night Live*, *Kenan & Kel*

“Here’s a reality check: Jason Dorsey rocks and this book rocks. It’s well-written, right on point, and will both shake your roots and strengthen them. The real reality is if you buy this book it will help you find yours.”

—Jeffrey Gitomer, author of *The Little Red Book of Selling*
and *The Little Black Book of Connections*

“*My Reality Check Bounced!* energizes and enlightens a generation who aspire to be the future leaders of America.”

—Stedman Graham

“A must-read for twentysomethings who want greater meaning and success in their real-world journey. Jason’s practical strategies and inspiring stories will fuel your passion to create a life you love.”

—Paul Orfalea, founder of Kinko’s and author of *Copy This!*

“This book makes it easy for a reader to do a self-assessment of his life, and brings clarity to the possible solutions. It makes one feel courageous, which is what we all need to make changes and move forward—or sideways, if that happens to be the right path.”

—Donna Conover, executive vice president,
customer operations, Southwest Airlines

“Outstanding, highly specific, usable advice for anyone seeking to advance their career so they can realize their dreams.”

—Gary Hoover, serial entrepreneur, founder of Hoover’s, Inc.

“I have known Jason since he was a nineteen-year-old with big dreams. He never gave up on those dreams no matter how tough the going. Now he lives his dream every day. The message in this book will help you do the same.”

—Admiral Bob Inman, former director,
National Security Agency, and deputy director, CIA

“Jason Dorsey has beautifully and powerfully captured the essence of the questions that have always been of concern to young adults but seldom addressed in as clear and compelling fashion. Regardless of our age, we make choices each day that have long-lasting effects on our success and fulfillment. *My Reality Check Bounced!* will help readers make wise choices about their futures.”

—Robert Goodwin, president and CEO, Points of Light Foundation

“*My Reality Check Bounced!* is a real gem of insight and practicality. This book will be a valued asset to any twentysomething who wants more out of life.”

—Dr. Pat Schwallie-Giddis, director of graduate programs in counseling
and human studies, George Washington University

“Jason’s book is filled with honest stories about young adults who have searched deep inside to find the happiness they were missing. The practical exercises and timely actions can help anyone create the future they desire.”

—Bob Carlquist, former executive vice president
and general manager, *Houston Chronicle*

“If communities tap into the ideas in this book, they will be much better prepared to unleash the talent of their young professionals.”

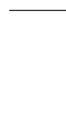
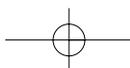
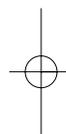
—Angelos Angelou, principal, Angelou Economics

“*My Reality Check Bounced!* delivers concrete action steps and real-world examples that any recent graduate can use immediately to live with more passion and purpose.”

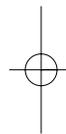
—Cal Newport, author of *How to Become a Straight-A Student*
and *How to Win at College*

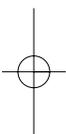
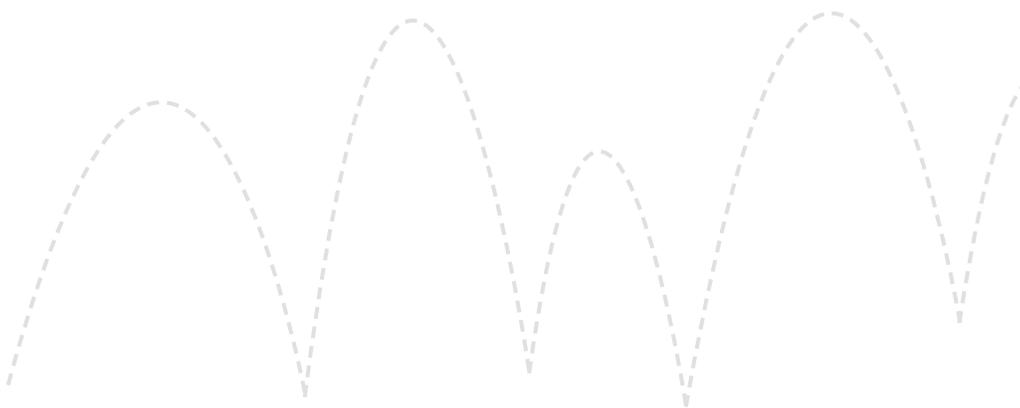
“Jason hits the bulls-eye in revealing the fears and hopes twentysomethings wake up to each morning. As a peer who “walks his talk,” he skillfully cuts through the standard real-world excuses to help twentysomethings figure out who they are and how far they can go. Jason’s credible message will inspire you whether you’re in your first real job or ten years into your career.”

—Mike Sheridan, former executive director, Texas Workforce Commission



MY REALITY CHECK **BOUNCED!**





MY REALITY CHECK **BOUNCED!**

**The Twentysomething's
Guide to Cashing In On
Your Real-World Dreams**

JASON RYAN DORSEY

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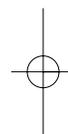
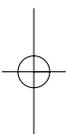
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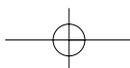
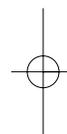
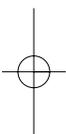
*This book is dedicated to the
courageous twentysomethings
who bravely leave the paved path
to pursue their authentic path.*



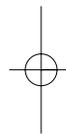


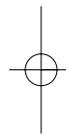
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MY REALITY CHECK **BOUNCED!**





1

STAND UP FOR YOUR LIFE!

We are all born unable to take care of ourselves. Living with meaning and purpose is a *learned* behavior.

REALITY-CHECK MOMENT— ***THIS ISN'T WHAT I SIGNED UP FOR!***

Tiffany, twenty-four, arrived distracted and anxious at the tiny coffee shop where we had agreed to meet. Despite her stylish business suit and expensive haircut and makeup, Tiffany had *the look*. I have seen it so often among twentysomethings in her situation. She was frustrated and disillusioned, wondering why her life just didn't feel right.

Tiffany thought she'd done everything she was supposed to. She made dean's list at her college and, after graduating, landed a great job. Now she was supposed to be spreading her wings, dating her true love, enjoying her career, and going on exciting adventures. Instead, the long hours and short tempers made her feel constantly on edge and insecure. She was asking herself the question about her place in life that haunts so many talented people in our generation: "*Is this it?*"

She felt trapped, stuck and confused. That's why she called me. She heard from a mutual friend that I helped people like her find their way again.

MY REALITY CHECK BOUNCED!

Tiffany ordered a double latte, then she cautiously confessed: She wasn't getting enough sleep. She didn't have time for her friends, family, or love life. She'd stopped working out. She was smoking too much. She wanted more freedom and sense of purpose. Despite working in a busy office six and sometimes seven days a week, she felt alone and lost. At twenty-four years old, Tiffany felt she was running hard *but going nowhere*.

"I never imagined I'd be in this position," she told me. "Maybe I was just young and naive, but I thought everything would fall into place and I'd love my life. It hasn't and I'm not. I'm stressed out all the time. I don't want to go to work; some days I don't even want to get out of bed. It's depressing. And I don't know what to do about it. I feel so confused. Nothing in college prepared me for this. Now I keep asking myself, *Is this what I worked so hard for?*"

Tiffany's reality check had bounced.

WELCOME TO THE REAL WHIRLED

Tiffany's not the only twentysomething who hasn't cashed in on her real-world dreams. Are you no longer a kid, but still unsure where you're headed or what your life's all about? Do you constantly find yourself settling for the safe path, rather than chasing what you most want? Are you spending hours downloading music or surfing the Web, chatting with friends on your cell phone, or watching late-night cable TV rather than living in the moment?

Are you helplessly watching your credit-card debt get bigger and bigger, while your relationships get shorter and shorter? Are you a victim of a bad economy, a mountain of college loans, or an egotistical boss? Are you living back in the

STAND UP FOR YOUR LIFE!

house in which you grew up, sleeping in your old bedroom, pleading for gas money? Or do you find yourself trying to share one bathroom with five roommates? Do you still not have the love life you want, the friendships you want, the adventures you want, the home you want, the body you want, the career you want, the respect you want, and the clear sense of purpose you want?

To make matters more frustrating, you know you deserve better. You're smart. You can work hard when it matters. You know how to push yourself when you need to. You also were raised to think this was supposed to be one of the best times of your life, but it doesn't seem all that euphoric right now.

All these factors make your situation only more frustrating and, in some cases, depressing. Friends can see it on your face no matter how you try to hide it. They can hear it in your voice. You sense it as soon as you wake up in the morning. Your annoyance with your situation shows through in everything you do. You, too, might even have *the look*.

I know because I went through this soul-searching turmoil myself. And it's becoming an anthem for twentysomethings around the world. I hear it from recent college grads to twenty-nine-year-old corporate executives: How can doing everything right end up feeling wrong?

While you might long for a sense of purpose, direction, love, or belonging, someone else your age salivates over a 7 Series BMW or a job in New York City; but one thing you share with all twentysomethings is a determination to create success *on your own terms*.

That's what differentiates you from previous generations. You don't want to play by someone else's rules. You've seen what punching the clock nine to nine every day, sitting in an airless cubicle, playing the corporate schmooze game, and

MY REALITY CHECK BOUNCED!

worshipping things at the expense of more meaningful dreams can do to a person's spirit, and you want no part of that. But what do you want?

Success on your own terms:

- To be free to enjoy sunny afternoons with friends, dance when no one is looking, and laugh out loud
- To be able to travel the world and learn about other cultures, ideas, and beliefs
- To pursue a clear and meaningful purpose
- To work with people you like, learn from, and respect
- To feel healthy, loved, and in love
- To make a difference in the world
- To use your talents, energy, and creativity
- To live in a place that feels like home
- To be respected
- To feel like your life means something

That's all part of filling the reality check void, and that's what this book is all about.

The challenge for you is that your vision of a meaningful, fulfilling life can conflict with an impersonal real world that does not want to accommodate your needs, ambition, personality, background, and perspective. It expects *you* to accommodate *it!* This creates an adversarial relationship that can make you feel powerless and grow into frustration, second guessing, confusion, and restlessness.

BREAKFAST WITH TIFFANY

Back at the coffee shop, I asked Tiffany what she could do to make her life more the way she wanted. I've found that most people who feel stuck like Tiffany know what they need to do.

STAND UP FOR YOUR LIFE!

They just haven't done it. Tiffany answered, "I need a job where I'm happy. That would be the biggest thing. I want to look forward to what I spend most of my day doing."

We talked about this for a while and came to the obvious conclusion that she needed either to somehow change her current work situation or to consider getting a different job. The only advice I gave her was something she had simply lost sight of in her frustration: *She was still in control of her life*—not her boss, best friend, roommates, or mom. Her life would start getting better *the moment* she stood up for herself.

Three weeks later, Tiffany and I met again at the tiny coffee shop. I was half expecting her to share some excuses as to why she hadn't done anything. Instead, *the look* was gone.

Tiffany was so excited to tell me what happened since our last conversation that I had to get her to slow down so I could get the story straight: Tiffany had decided that she was sick and tired of being overworked and underappreciated, so she told her boss exactly what was on her mind. At first he was flustered and insulted. Then he blamed her for the situation. "At the end of the week I was ready to quit," she said. "When suddenly my boss walks into my office, apologizes, and gives me a twenty-four-thousand-dollar raise and control of my schedule!"

We high-fived in the middle of the coffee shop!

Tiffany sipped her latte and then said, "I never saw how much control I had over my life until I used it. For a while there I really thought being unhappy was part of growing up and becoming an adult. I was scared. I was afraid that telling my boss how I felt might get me fired or make me look childish. I don't feel that way anymore. In fact, I think my frustration was an alarm telling me it was time to be honest with myself and start doing what was best for me."

MY REALITY CHECK BOUNCED!

Tiffany was beginning to see something that many twenty-somethings overlook as they are pushed around in the real world: You choose your own path. You choose where you work. You choose whom you date. You choose where you live. You choose what you study. You choose what you do in your free time. You choose, and those choices strung together become your life.

One year later Tiffany did leave her job. She took a new position in a coastal town. Now she likes where she works and the people she works with, she has a serious boyfriend with talk of marriage on the horizon, and she hangs out at the beach on the weekends. What a life! And she made it all happen by courageously standing up for her life and herself.

Tiffany, like you, had the power all along to start creating a life that felt meaningful and right. The only person who doubted that was herself. Not anymore.

BOUNCED: My happiness is out of my hands.

CASHED: How I feel about my life is determined by how I choose to live my life.

LET'S GET READY TO RUMBLE

You may think you found this book at just the right time. I think you're right! This book's message—to stand up and create the life you want—is precisely what you need to hear *now*. Part of your life, maybe the entire last few years, has left you wanting more meaning, inspiration, adventure, and purpose. It's time you do something about it. By picking this book as your guide, you are also telling the world that you want to pave this path on your own terms.

STAND UP FOR YOUR LIFE!

What you need are not excuses, money-back guarantees, or group hugs but time-tested strategies to get you on a better course. You usually pick up these strategies after years of being promoted through the school of hard knocks. But you don't want to wade through years of setbacks and sucker punches to learn how to feel alive. You want to use every resource and talent you can to get what you most want out of your life right *now*. Me, too!

Together we can.

Whether your vision for an awe-inspiring, meaningful life begins with

- Marrying your best friend
- Finding your life purpose
- Earning a promotion
- Starting your own business
- Graduating with a fancy degree
- Losing weight
- Climbing a mountain
- Changing the world

or something more intimate—you *have an idea of what you want your life to look, feel, taste, smell, and sound like*. At this precise moment, all that separates you from living that amazing experience are learning, action, and time.

Fortunately,

1. **You have chosen to learn.** This book will reveal what you need to know, some things you already know, and a few things you will never forget.
2. **You control your actions.** You determine when you apply what you know, so you can start benefiting from your smarts as soon as you are ready.
3. **Your future starts today!** The sooner you work to create the life you desire, the sooner you will have it!

MY REALITY CHECK BOUNCED!

YOU'VE GOT THE POWER

At twenty-four, Tiffany had to start living like she meant it if she was going to feel truly alive. No other person understood her hopes, dreams, memories, and fears the way she did. No other person understands *your* hopes, dreams, memories, and fears the way *you* do. Tiffany felt as if she were being smothered by her job and forced to silence her dreams. But settling for safe was *her choice*. All along Tiffany had the power to make her life the way she wanted it, and now she's doing just that. *Will you?*

You have ambitions and abilities; it's time they produced results. You have good ideas bouncing around in your head; it's time they came to life. You know in your heart you were born to do more, be more, and experience more. But only you can make what you believe to be possible spring to life. *Only you.*

If I've learned anything listening to and documenting so many different individual life stories, it's that finding your place in the world doesn't hinge on the impersonal real world. It hinges on *your world*. Once you let go of common twenty-something beliefs—such as “it's out of my control” and “it's not my fault” and “it's not the right time”—you will be free to start doing what it takes to get where you want. You will rise above your confusion and be able to live life on terms you establish and to get what you demand.

NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT

Like Tiffany, you may have lost sight of your power to choose and, as a result, talked yourself out of control and into an unsatisfying rut. This is a challenging predicament and can be solved only by recognizing there will never be a magical right

STAND UP FOR YOUR LIFE!

time to stand up for yourself and your future. All you have is right now. Until you see right now as the time to make changes for the better, you will continue feeling overwhelmed by your surroundings and situation. You will turn this feeling into excuses that keep you from breaking free such as: rent, car payments, credit-card bills, how your boss is unfair, how you need another degree, what your mom wants you to do . . . all of which only reinforce your unsatisfying holding pattern.

Waiting for any other time, especially the right time, to make your break for your dreams just wastes irreplaceable opportunities. You end up sitting on your dreams while your fears and insecurities take the lead. You continue getting older and more frustrated but not an inch closer to what will bring more meaning and satisfaction to your life, yet it's entirely your choice—even if you decide to ignore the fact that you choose the life you lead.

This was Tiffany's challenge. The more she stalled waiting for her situation to get better, the more helpless she felt. Unfortunately, most twentysomethings never experience a neon-bright moment of divine intervention or profound clarity that inspires them to finally leap after their dreams. Instead, with each passing year of not being satisfied and not doing anything about it, they grow more reluctant to take the risks necessary to create the outcomes they long for. Before they know it, they look back and wonder where all that time went. *You deserve better.*

You deserve to be excited about each and every day. You deserve to wake up feeling confident, inspired, and on the right track. You deserve to go to sleep beside your best friend secure in the fact your life means something. You deserve to give yourself a chance to make this happen.

MY REALITY CHECK BOUNCED!

GETTING A GRIP

Your true passion for life will surface only when you take responsibility for creating the life you want. Until you do this, other people and events will choose for you. And your boss, neighbor, parents, and old high-school friends don't have nearly as much riding on your happiness and fulfillment as you do. Taking responsibility for your future gives you the choice to put everything you have into getting what you want, whether that is inner peace or a purple Porsche.

Tiffany, like you, was standing at a real-world crossroad. She was going to either let her reality check keep bouncing or cash in on her courage. She made the right choice and so can you.

HOW DO I KNOW ALL THIS?

Because I've been there, done that. I've dedicated the last nine years of my life to listening to and helping people who feel frustrated, beaten down, uninspired, trapped, and lost. To accomplish this I've traveled over a million miles and talked with more than five hundred thousand people about what makes life worth living.

My quest has taken me from quiet ranches in Kansas to bustling ports in Maine to crowded cities in Egypt, Finland, and Spain. I've been hired to advise some of the wealthiest twentysomethings in the world. I've freely helped thousands more scratching by in abject poverty. I've built a thriving career teaching ordinary people how to break free and live extraordinary lives.

In the process, I've learned all of us have room to grow. Rich kids in the suburbs taught me that we all have insecurities we must address. Children I've met who survived geno-

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cide taught me that there is no limit to human resilience. Twentysomethings who graduated from Ivy League colleges and then moved in with their moms showed me that *potential alone does not guarantee success*. Most of all, I've learned that making your life the way you want it starts with jumping in with both feet.

At eighteen years old, I risked everything I had to follow my gut by leaving college as a junior to write a book. This was the scariest—and in my parents' view at the time dumbest—decision I've ever made. I had worked hard to start college earlier than normal and had great job offers awaiting my graduation. By withdrawing from school I was trading my path to Wall Street riches for the unknown hardships of living with meaning. I had no idea what I was getting into, *only what I was leaving behind*.

I left college because I felt the path that I was on—the standard go to college, get a good job, get married, make babies, and so on—was no longer inspiring. The one passion I had was helping people who, like me, came from challenging backgrounds. I thought writing a practical book teaching young people how to get a head start on the real world could make a difference.

I wrote that book in my college dorm room at age eighteen. Writing the book took me three weeks—it's amazing how fast you can type when your future is riding on it. Then I borrowed money from everyone I knew and paid to publish the book myself. This was the only way I could think to get the book in to the hands of the young people who I thought could most benefit from it.

Having spent all my borrowed money on publishing the book, I wound up spending the next year sleeping on the floor of a friend's garage apartment. Every day I went around my city telling anyone who would listen what I was up to. That

MY REALITY CHECK BOUNCED!

entire year I lived on about \$4 per day (I can cook ramen noodles *thirty-eight ways*). Before turning nineteen, I managed to ring up over \$50,000 in debt thanks to loans, credit cards, and business lines of credit. My friends were impressed, and my parents were terrified.

Progress that first year was excruciatingly slow. Sometimes I felt as if I were going in circles, and other times I felt as if I were repeatedly hitting my head on a concrete wall. So many nights I went to sleep on the cheap beige carpet depressed and frustrated. My big break came when I was invited to speak to a group of students and teachers about my book. In this one speech to forty people, my message found an audience. They told other people who told other people, which led to more speeches and more books.

Over 1,550 schools and colleges eventually adopted my first book, *Graduate to Your Perfect Job*, as required reading. That launched me into keynoting conferences for everyone from corporate executives and wealthy entrepreneurs to community events for gang leaders, college students, and single parents. In three years, I went from sleeping on a garage floor to meeting the president of the United States and sharing what I had learned on national television shows such as the *Today* show and *The View*.

A DISTURBING TREND

All that led back to more conversations with people my age about what weighed most heavily on their minds.

In the last few years, those conversations took on a consistently disturbing tone. Smart people in their twenties from all walks of life were calling and e-mailing me with their frustration and discontent. They felt unexpectedly uninspired about their place in the world.

STAND UP FOR YOUR LIFE!

Their angst ran deeper than money, titles, and degrees. They were expecting the real world to bring them *happiness, meaning, and purpose*; but instead it brought confusion and second guessing.

This crisis hit close to home. I had been through this turmoil, and it led me to leave college and write my first book. That one big leap of faith put me on a course that has been inspiring and rewarding. But many of my friends and contacts were not feeling so lucky or confident. From the outside they looked okay, but inside they were slowly falling apart.

They dealt with their growing dissatisfaction in a number of ways: one-night stands, maxing out their credit cards, weekend drinking binges, moving in with Mom, changing jobs frequently, and questioning their previous decisions. Underneath it all, they felt unsettled and alone. I heard this story so many times, I felt I had to do something to help. I became intensely focused on addressing this twentysomething search for meaning.

HOW THIS BOOK WORKS

Each chapter of this book is packed with stories of real twentysomethings—plus a few older and a few younger—who have survived the ups and downs of life just like you and me. These are everyday people who have chosen to look deep inside their heart, mind, and soul to figure out who they are and where they are going. This questioning allowed them to have earth-shaking epiphanies that changed their life; the same thing can happen to you.

Walking a few miles in their shoes will stretch you in new directions, because they've dared to not settle, defied defeat, and broke free from the prison of indecision and insecurity. Looking at the world through their eyes, you can reap

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their gain without their pain. These stories will also serve as a reminder that you're not alone but one part of a larger movement toward meaning, which is taking place around the globe.

Weaving the stories together are *specific actions* you can immediately use to escape from your restlessness. These actions will get you unstuck, on fire, and back in control. That's why it's necessary for you complete the interactive sections in the book *as you read*. (Yes, write in this book! Forget what your sixth-grade English teacher said, you bought this book so you have the right to write in it and make it your own!) The interactive sections are brief and a bit challenging, but the payoffs to you will be huge.

As a bonus, if you're *really ready* to start getting more out of your life, I've included a few "Reality Check Challenges." These challenges will push you to go to some places you may not want to go. But once you do, your perception, confidence, and direction will be transformed.

As Tiffany learned, feeling inspired about your life comes from taking responsibility for creating the life you want. This book contains the practical, real-world knowledge you've been looking for *to get from where you are now to where you want to be*. In your hands are the steps you need to take to make your life as fulfilling as you want. But only you can make it happen. Once you finish reading, you have a choice: either put it off until tomorrow or live like you mean it today. I vote you live it. Time will be on your side once you start making the most of what you have *now*.

STAND UP FOR YOUR LIFE!

INSTANT MESSAGE

- ▶ You never realize how much control you have until you use it!
- ▶ Right now is the right time to start living like you mean it.
- ▶ Time is on your side once you act like today matters.

BOUNCED: My happiness is out of my hands.

CASHED: How I feel about my life is determined by how I choose to live my life.

ONLINE: Find out where Tiffany is now at
www.myrealitycheckbounced.com/book