

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

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FULL TRANSCRIPT:

Forrest Doddington: Hello. Welcome to the Ayers All Access podcast brought to you by the Ayers Institute for Learning & Innovation. This podcast is a chance for us to help you access compelling people, current topics, practical tips, and innovative solutions— all related to the field of education. To find out more about this podcast and all the work of the Ayers Institute, check out our website at AyersInstitute.org. You could also find us on Twitter and Facebook at @Ayres Institute.

I'm Forrest Doddington, the Technology & Digital Communications Specialist at the Ayers Institute. Thanks for joining us for this "favored book" episode. Our featured book was written by popular author and speaker Bob Goff and was nominated by Andrea Pewitt who is here to share about it. Andrea has 8 years of experience as a classroom teacher and as a Supervisor of Special Education Services for a local school district. For the last 5 years, she has served as the Program Director for the IDEAL program at Lipscomb University: offering a full university experience for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities and helping them prepare for their futures.

Andrea, thanks for joining us today.

Andrea Pewitt: Thanks so much, Forrest. It's exciting to be here and talk about these books that I have absolutely loved reading.

Forrest Doddington: Today you've brought the book written by Bob Goff, "Everybody, Always: becoming love in a world full of setbacks and difficult people." I know that you've told me that, as an educator, this is one of your favorite books. So, I'm wondering who do you think would be most interested in inspired by reading this book?

Andrea Pewitt: I think this book can inspire anyone in education field from administrator, from teacher, staff member, even parents and community members. I think it will reach just about any sector of the education field.

Forrest Doddington: Okay. So, the audience is very broad and could touch a lot of people. Why don't you give me a brief summary? How would you describe this book to someone who hasn't yet read it?

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

Andrea Pewitt: So, this book really, it's an easy read. And it's a fun read because it is stories from Bob Goff. So, they are his life stories and different experiences that— Everyone has life experiences that teach them some lesson. But, all of his tied back to the ways that God presents himself in everyday scenarios and the way that God wants us to love others and the way He commands us to love others. And so, through humor and through stories, Bob talks about ways that we can love others, even when it's difficult or when it's challenging.

And I believe that's so important in education, especially with students, because some students are thriving and seeking for that recognition or that connection with someone. And so sometimes it's difficult as a teacher to connect with all students, especially some of the more frisky students or students who are more excited.

But I truly believe that relationships are huge in education. And I believe that as God tells us, we should love everyone regardless, even when it's most difficult. And so, what I love about this book is the way that he shows us what it truly means to love others and what it means to love everybody always. Even when it's hard, when it's difficult. But we can show God's love and we can love other people. And if we could just change our mindset, I think it would make a lot of change just in society in general, but also in education as well.

Forrest Doddington: Okay. So, this is definitely an inside-out book. I mean, love is a transformational, it's a core thing. And you're saying love everybody always. Before we dig deeper into the book, I'd like to know a little bit more about your professional journey. Tell us about your journey and maybe some highlights of the different jobs that you've had.

Andrea Pewitt: Yeah. So, I started teaching in 1999. I started in a first-grade classroom with 22 first graders. (Which at that time was a large number, but now it's not apparently.) And so, I think every first-year teacher has the same experience of you pray that the children survive. And that they eventually graduate from high school and you didn't damage them. That was my first year because there's a lot of things that you're not taught in school that you can't know every situation. But I learned a lot of lessons through those students, and I have students through the elementary years that I stayed connected with or that always have stories. So that's a that's a whole nother podcast. But...

So, I started teaching with first grade and then I taught kindergarten and a transition-first. During my second year of teaching, I had two deaf girls in my classroom. And they taught me more than I think I ever taught them as far as loving others and showing compassion and showing how to push through challenges. And with that, I realized I did not know enough about the special education law to help these girls and help their families navigate that. So, I went back to get my masters. So, I studied a curriculum and instruction with a specialization in special ed.

Forrest Doddington: Okay.

Andrea Pewitt: That's how I took that route.

Forrest Doddington: And that's why you were teaching in a general education classroom, right?

Andrea Pewitt: Yes. So, I was a junior teacher, and then I became an inclusion teacher. So, I had all the students with IEPs and different things in my classroom or just unidentified needs. Then I decided that I wanted to be an administrator, which was something I said I would never do. I grew up in a family of

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

educators. My father was elected superintendent, then later an appointed superintendent. My mother was a teacher. But I found that I really wanted to help more families learn how to navigate mainly the special ed laws because they're so challenging. And I wanted to fight for those students.

So, I went back and got my education specialist degree in administration and supervision and then was later appointed the Director of Special Ed in Cheatham County. And so, while serving there, I was able to help families navigate the IEP process and provide services that were most appropriate for their students. And then a few years into that, I decided I wanted to work at a university. I was working on my doctorate here at Lipscomb.

Forrest Doddington: Okay.

Andrea Pewitt: And the IDEAL program popped up on my screen one day, and I said, "Oh, this is God showing me another direction." And so, I applied and here I am. So, I was able to work with— still with the special ed population— with adults with disabilities in the IDEAL program and families and kind of help them navigate this new world once they get out of the K-12 world and out of transition into college and adulthood. And what does that look like?

Forrest Doddington: And so, I think this connects so well with the theme of this book of "loving everybody, always." Tell people, just in a in a short summary, what the IDEAL program is and what's happened over the last few years.

Andrea Pewitt: Yeah. So IDEAL is a two-year certificate program at Lipscomb that is designed for students that are age 18 to 26 that have an intellectual disability. So, it allows young adults who do not have the opportunity to go to college to seek a degree, but to go to college to get a certificate in Career exploration. And so, the goal of the program is employment post-graduation.

So, we have young adults who, as children might have been told, families might have been told, you know, they're going to live at home forever. Or they're not going to be able to get a job or be able to live on their own, live independently. And we're changing that narrative. We're changing that perspective. And so IDEAL as showing not only our students and our families, but other students here at Lipscomb, traditional students that.

Forrest Doddington: I love seeing the stories, (you know, they come out once or twice a year) about different students and their careers that have started.

Andrea Pewitt: Yes.

Forrest Doddington: Not just a two-year experience here, but their careers that have started and continued after their experience here.

Andrea Pewitt: Yes, we've got some amazing stories! So that's already got your third podcast for you.

Forrest Doddington: There's so much good stuff to talk about!

Andrea Pewitt: So many! But there are so many careers and jobs out there that you just have to reshape and carve a little bit. But our students are worth more than washing tables. If that's what their career goal is and if that's what they truly want to do, then we're going to help them reach them. But we have

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

students who are working in advertising or who are working in video production, working in jewelry, making. Just really whatever their career goal is, we will help them shape that.

Forrest Doddington: That's great. Really great.

Okay. Tell me about— We're talking here with Dr. Andrea Pewitt, who's an experienced educator and a special education specialist about the book "Everybody, Always" by Bob Goff. What about your professional journey? You know— At what point in your journey (I think I want to ask) did you discover this book and why do you think it connected with what you were going through?

Andrea Pewitt: Yeah. So, I discovered this book just about a year ago. I was scrolling through Audible, trying to find something new to listen to. And I had read his previous book, "Love Does," and really enjoyed that. And this one— what caught my eye were the balloons on the front cover. I love balloons. And balloons make people happy. And so, I thought, well, this is interesting. And I wanted to read it. And I did. And probably within like a day or two.

And so, it really resonated with me about how people are viewed often by outward appearances or by a disability or the way they dress or where they live. And they're viewed as 'not someone that I want to talk to.' Not necessarily me, but others. And so, it's it reminded me that we are called to love everyone, regardless of who they are, because they were created by God. Created in his image. And we have to look past the exterior and get to know people and love people. And even when it's hard. And so, when there are challenging students or there are challenging parents that everyone has to deal with, we have to dig a little deeper and find out what it is that causes the concern or the issues. And then try to start from there and work the way back up. Kind of the iceberg effect. So, looking 'below the surface' and going from there.

Forrest Doddington: Good, good, good.

Okay, so let's dig in now. Just like you said— let's dig in a little deeper on this book. Thinking about teachers and about education leaders. Maybe they're new to the profession or maybe they have many years of experience. What are some takeaways from this book that could make a positive impact on their professional practice?

Andrea Pewitt: I think just the title in general, "Everybody, Always." And just remember to love everybody. Always. Stepping back, looking below the surface, remembering that these are children of God. That they were created by God. They're here for a purpose. They were created on purpose.

One of the things that that Bob talks about in the book is to live without fear. And so, don't let fear hold you back from reaching out to that family or reaching out to a student or accepting a student into your classroom that you may not have considered before. And just really using that as the guide to teach. And use that as a guide to build those relationships with students and with families. Because it will it will set everyone up for success.

Forrest Doddington: You're making me think about the power of the fear of the unknown and how often that affects us, even whether we approach to form a relationship. There's so much unknown. And do we press through that, or do we just not get to know them at all?

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

Andrea Pewitt: Yeah. So, there was one quote in the book about how God guides us to uncomfortable places. And he does that not to push us out of a comfort zone or not to make us lose sight. But he pushes us to those uncomfortable places to show us that he is still with us. He is beside us, and he will pull us out of those uncomfortable places. If we— We love people through everything. And just kind of— It is the fear of the unknown, and it's that it's the uncomfortable setting. And so, I think going back to his theory of loving people can help pull you out of those as well.

Forrest Doddington: Okay. Is there another takeaway?

Andrea Pewitt: He also talked about— And this really resonated with me a lot. That he reminds us that God doesn't want us to study him like he's an academic project, but he wants us to become love. And the way we do that is we love others. And so, he talks about telling people who they are and not what it is you want them to be. So, I think with students especially, we remind students who they are. That they are— They are children or they're created from God. And especially the young adults that I work with in this population that, you know, they may have a disability, but that's not who they are. They are more than that. And so, I think reminding myself and others that we are more than the outside is really a big— A big takeaway, I think, that can be put in any situation.

Forrest Doddington: So rather than what we want of people— telling them 'who they are.' Letting them blossom into who they are.

I've heard it phrased that "we need to speak life," like, our words are very powerful when we 'speak life.' And I'm a parent myself and it's so— it's so important! But we're so in the moment often. And I guess this affects work and it affects home and it affects classrooms: to not just be in the tasks, but to— That power. So many teachers I've met are teachers because someone said, "You would make a good teacher someday" and it stuck with them.

Andrea Pewitt: Absolutely.

Forrest Doddington: Do you see that yourself? I mean, what are some examples of telling people who they are?

Andrea Pewitt: Yeah. So, I had teachers tell me that I would be a great teacher. I didn't want to listen. And I once again said that was the one thing I would never do. I learned to never say never. Obviously, that doesn't work. But seeing students that we've had come in and just change, kind of, where they were headed for going in with the mindset of 'I can't do something' and then changing that.

My deaf girls that I talked about that I had the second year I was teaching. I stayed in contact with the girls and their families. And one of the girls, when it was her senior year of high school, she called her dad and told him to come to graduation. She was at Kentucky School for the Deaf and he went up to her graduation. And he called me when the graduation was over and he's crying. And I said, "Why are you crying?" She graduated valedictorian.

Forrest Doddington: Wow.

Andrea Pewitt: And she did not want him to know. She wanted to surprise him.

Forrest Doddington: Wow.

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

Andrea Pewitt: And so, then she went on to college, she went to Gallaudet in D.C. and while she was there, she wanted to be a nurse. And she told him, you know, I want to be a nurse. And he told her she couldn't. He said, "You can't be a nurse because you're deaf." And she said, "You've always told me I can be anything I want to be. So why are you telling me that now?" And he was like, "Because you're deaf. You have to be able to communicate." And she continued to fight back, you know, like "I'm going to be a nurse." Ended up changing her major while she was there. Went into social work. Went on and got her master's degree and is now living out West, independently working as a social worker in the deaf community. And it's a beautiful story, but that is one example of how even as a parent, we're telling our children, 'you can be anything you want to be.' But then when they come back and say, "But I want to do this," and then we say, Oh, but no, you can't do that. So, when we change that mindset of, okay, then let's do it and let's, you know, go for what we can do, right? And that's what our students that come through the IDEAL program, they've always been told, 'you can't do something.' And but we're showing them the other side that you CAN do something. It may look different.

Forrest Doddington: And it may be hard.

Andrea Pewitt: Yeah, there are hard things. And I always tell my students and my own children, "You can do hard things." And my son's favorite thing for me to tell him is you can do hard things.

Forrest Doddington: That means something hard is coming, doesn't it?

Andrea Pewitt: Yes, I get the roll a lot. But, you know, it's changing that that mindset of 'you can't do something,' but 'you can but it just may look differently than your peer who is pursuing the same dream.'

Forrest Doddington: That's powerful. Absolutely.

Okay. Well, let's talk about applying this. What are some ways that either you've experienced in your own career or some ways that you can think of that, you know, these messages from this book could be applied into an educator's personal practice?

Andrea Pewitt: So, I think one of the biggest ways through application, especially with educators and new educators, is working with families. That's often very scary for new professionals because parents can sometimes come in very angry or upset about something. And then just stepping back and putting yourself in their shoes, showing that empathy and still loving them where they are and working from there can make a big difference in those relationships.

With children, oftentimes the children that are the 'problem' student or the student who is the 'troublemaker' are the ones that are pushed aside and slip through the cracks. And those are the students that I say you pour into the most because they're the ones who are seeking some type of recognition. So, the students who are the star athletes who are in all the ball games and teachers are there cheering them on is wonderful. But then you still have a population of students that are being left to the side because they don't perform like other students do. And so, pushing your focus towards those students is really— can be incredible and life changing. Not only for the student, but for yourself.

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

And so going back to the principle of Bob Goff, of "love everyone, always," it makes it easier to focus on those students when your mindset changes to, "I have to love everyone and not just the straight-A students or the ones who do all the tasks that I ask."

Forrest Doddington: Well, Andrea, thank you so much for sharing the book "Everyone, Always" by Bob Goff with us. And thank you for your work in education.

Andrea Pewitt: Thank you so much. I appreciate it.

Forrest Doddington: To all our listeners, be sure to check out the show notes for this episode where you'll find links to helpful resources and anything we've mentioned today. I hope you've been encouraged and inspired. You can find more episodes of Ayers Institute podcasts at <https://podcast.AyersInstitute.org>, on Apple Podcasts, and anywhere podcasts are found.

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