

## The Essential 55: Gratitude Transcript of Episode 397

**Julie Walker:** Hello, and welcome to the Arts of Language Podcast with Andrew Pudewa, founder of the Institute for Excellence in Writing or as many like to say, “IEW.” My name is Julie Walker, and I’m honored to serve Andrew and IEW as the chief marketing officer. Our goal is to equip teachers and teaching parents with methods and materials, which will aid them in training their students to become confident and competent communicators and thinkers.

**Julie Walker:** So Andrew, I know this happens to you a lot where a friend recommends a book, and the book is so good you just can't wait to tell everybody about it.

**Andrew Pudewa:** That has happened. Usually, you're one of the first people I tell.

**Julie Walker:** It's true, and we actually did a podcast on your top books, your books of the year, but we haven't done the one for 2023 yet.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, I think you know what it's going to be. We can't announce until the end of the year.

**Julie Walker:** Tis true.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Just because some other book may slip in and displace the current competitor. But it would have to be a remarkably extraordinarily, unbelievably good book to beat the one that is for 2023.

**Julie Walker:** And listener, you want just a little sneak peek preview of what that book could be, we did record a podcast on it that we haven't launched yet.

**Andrew Pudewa:** With the author.

**Julie Walker:** Yes, with the author, and so that should be coming out in the next week or so, but this week being the first week of November, I thought it appropriate to talk about this book that was recommended to me that I love so much because the underlying theme throughout the book is gratitude. And of course, November is National Gratitude Month, as if we need a special month to put aside to remind ourselves to be grateful.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah, it reminds me of when I was doing the original student writing intensive, running around these things.

**Julie Walker:** Oh, I love this.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And on the third day of the four day student writing intensive, we'd do the mini books with the topic-clincher, and I had a big bag of highlighters. Well, of course, the highlighters were all different colors, blue, yellow, pink, and a bunch of kids, and like, “I want blue, I want yellow.” You could spend 15 minutes negotiating highlighter colors, which I didn't want to do, I didn't have time to do, so I would always say, “Look, I'm gonna throw you a highlighter, and no matter what happens, whether you catch it, or whether it hits you in

the nose, whether you like the color, or hate the color, you say, thank you. Because, if you can learn to be grateful for whatever happens, no matter what it is, you will be a happier person.”

**Julie Walker:** Exactly.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And then I would say a really ridiculous thing, which I don't think any kids believe me, but objectively it's true. “If you could be equally as grateful for a broken leg as for a million dollars, you would be a perfectly happy person.”

**Julie Walker:** Exactly. And that highlighter thing, Andrew, the other thing is you didn't let the students trade. They used the one that was tossed at them.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah, and sometimes I did try to hit them in the nose.

**Julie Walker:** It's true. It's true. So this book is not called The Highlighter Trick.

**Andrew Pudewa:** No, that would be my book. This is called...

**Julie Walker:** *The Essential 55*. And this was written by Ron Clark. The first edition of this was published in 2003. I have in my hands the most recent edition, which was published in 2019. And he's had to change some of the “rules.” The essential 55 is essentially a list of fifty-five rules plus twenty-six more that a teacher, Ron Clark, encourages other teachers to teach their students in their classroom.

**Andrew Pudewa:** One question I would have if I saw a book by this title, *Essential 55 Rules You Should Teach All Your Students*, don't do it all at once.

**Julie Walker:** right, exactly,

**Andrew Pudewa:** Like, we probably need an EZ+1 approach here.

**Julie Walker:** Yes. And my friend that I was telling you about that introduced this book to me, she actually puts up a new banner every day or so that has a new rule on it. So she does sequentially go through. And the first one that is in the 2003 book is “Respond with yes, sir, or yes, ma'am, when speaking to an adult.”

And so you start there.

**Andrew Pudewa:** That's pretty extreme. There would be very few classrooms anywhere in this country where kids are being even encouraged, let alone required to do stuff like that.

**Julie Walker:** Right. But I think the idea is just when an adult is speaking to you, acknowledge them.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Did you see the movie about him?

**Julie Walker:** I have not.

**Andrew Pudewa:** It's been a long time since I saw the movie. It's called *The Ron Clark Story*. It's one of those teacher hero movies. There's a half a dozen good ones. And I always

mention that in these teacher hero movies, there's always a scene where the teacher is playing some kind of game to engage otherwise unengaged students. And when I saw this movie, I realized this is not a game I'm going to play. But it was that scene where he gets a whole bunch of cartons of chocolate milk. And every time they answer a question or something, he drinks a carton of chocolate milk. And he's drinking this unbelievable, and unhealthy, amount of chocolate milk, and then he pretends like he's gonna vomit, and of course this causes all the kids to crack up.

But it's one of those things where you have to meet the students where they're at. And then have a system to raise them up. And so I'm assuming this is probably the true Ron Clark, not the movie-ized version. Although it would be interesting to find out from him how much of that movie is really true.

**Julie Walker:** Right. Well, he's got a crazy story of when he used to work for Dunkin Donuts and locked himself in the oven. And, I mean, he's kind of a wacky guy. And I think today's teacher, you almost have to be that wacky to endear yourself to your students because there's that expectation of arms crossed, what do you got for me?

**Andrew Pudewa:** And there's two schools of thought on that. Not necessarily either one is correct. One is edutainment is absolutely necessary. If you're not entertaining while you're teaching, nobody's going to learn anything. But then the opposite side is that's entirely a modern phenomena. It's not necessary. People have learned things for hundreds, thousands of years without being catered to. So like all things, there's a balance in there. And I, of course, enjoy humor in teaching. I enjoy trying to find engaging things. But there's also a case where I'm not going to stoop down and drink 20 cartons of chocolate milk or something.

**Julie Walker:** No, but I have seen you fall on a desk pretending to be bitten by a blue ringed octopus.

**Andrew Pudewa:** True, that has happened.

**Julie Walker:** So do you mind, can I just read through some of these rules?

**Andrew Pudewa:** I'm sure everyone's very curious.

**Julie Walker:** Yes. And so again, I just want to kind of focus on the ones that are connected to gratitude, because I think that is foundational to all of this. Respond to an adult when spoken to. Rule number one.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Because you should be grateful if an adult actually speaks to you.

**Julie Walker:** Well, it's kind of a respect thing, right? And it's not just adults, but fellow classmates, and that actually is rule number three: make eye contact when spoken to. I love that one. When I'm talking to a younger student, I just am so grateful when they look me right in the eye and they have that confidence. Number three, congratulate classmates. I think that is also mutual respect.

**Andrew Pudewa:** We're learning to celebrate together.

**Julie Walker:** Well, and he has this rule where you have to applaud, and he teaches them how to clap. Loudly. Loudly for at least, I think he says five seconds, something like that. Like, not just wimpy clapping. And I know that you demonstrated that, Andrew, when you read a student paper. You ask the students. You don't ask them to, but you demonstrate clapping and all the students just want to chime in and they do clap well. They congratulate each other.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, it gives, it creates a certain energy.

**Julie Walker:** Yes. Exactly. Respect other students' comments, opinions, and ideas. I think this is so important today. Well, anytime. But his idea is don't look for the argument against what they're saying because you don't always agree with everyone. And he teaches that. You don't have to agree with someone to acknowledge that their idea is a good one. And he teaches them how to do that. I like that step by step of this is how to do that. If you win, do not brag. If you lose, do not show anger. I can think of a three-year-old grandson who would do well to learn this lesson.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah, that's definitely a life lesson. Well, we know anytime we get caught between that pride and despair, right? That's why I feel a lot of the grading system that we've brought into schools, really, I guess for a hundred years, and now there's moves to go away with it, but they don't know how to replace it with something better. But you do have, like, I'm so good because I get A's, or I'll never be good at this because I can never get a good grade, and how do you create a feedback system that doesn't cultivate pride, arrogance, or anger and despair? That's the trick of life right there.

**Julie Walker:** It's so true. Let us know when you've written that book, Andrew, and I'll be sure we share it. One of the things that he also says is, and I love this too, "if you are asked a question in conversation, ask a question in return." That way the conversation is not all about one person.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh, that's such an important and valuable skill. I, not long ago, went to a family reunion, which was not my family, and I met a lot of people that I had never met. And I sat next to a young woman, I'd say in her thirties. And sustaining conversation was so exhausting because I would come up with what I thought was a pretty good question. And I'd get a one word or one sentence answer and then silence. And after a while, I just, I couldn't think of anything more. I didn't want to do any, I mean, I, the whole thing just came to a miserable stall, halt. And then, I don't know, Providence saved me. She got up and moved somewhere else in the room, and so I didn't have to try and do that. But it made me realize there is a skill in being able to ask a good question of someone else.

**Andrew Pudewa:** In contrast, I was recently at an event where a 16 year old girl, who I've known since she was 6 or 7 years old, so we're kind of friends, although we'd only see each other maybe twice a year. She said to me, "So tell me something about yourself that I don't know."

**Andrew Pudewa:** I thought, wow, this is dangerous. And then she said, "I have found this to be a very good thing to ask people because you always learn something that you didn't know, and it stimulates good conversations."

So I said, "I will tell you something about myself that you do not know if you will do the same." It just kind of juxtaposed the difference between a young person who had been

cultivating that skill of asking questions. And someone who obviously never been taught or didn't care. I don't know.

**Julie Walker:** Right. I do want to mention to any of you listeners who are working out, walking, riding your bike, whatever you're doing when you listen to our podcast—fear not, I will put a link to these notes in our podcast notes so that you don't have to quickly jot them down. But Andrew, some of your feedback is super helpful. Did you ever play tennis growing up? Did you ever play on a tennis team or anything like that?

**Andrew Pudewa:** No, the few times I played tennis was a very bad experience of mostly just chasing balls and being bored and frustrated. So, I never got to the point of tennis where it was any fun at all.

**Julie Walker:** Well, I did play tennis, the tennis team, for at least a year. I'm trying to remember if it was two or one year or two. But having a conversation with someone who doesn't ask a question in return is like playing against someone, an invisible someone.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Who can't return the ball?

**Julie Walker:** And I, yes, exactly. So I think about the drills of serving. You just get that big basket of balls, and you've got a hundred balls, and you've got to get a hundred serves. And there's no one on the other side returning them. And you're just thwack, thwack, thwack, trying to get it in. And then, of course, what you have to do is go to the other side, pick them all up, and reserve them to the other side. But that's not fun.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, I don't know if the analogy is great because the best tennis players pretty much just toast their opposition on the serve by making an unreturnable serve. But I do get your point. There has to be back and forth for there to be engagement level. And so, yeah, teaching kids how to do that. So important.

**Julie Walker:** “Cover your mouth when you sneeze or cough, and say, excuse me.”

**Andrew Pudewa:** It's almost sad that a teacher would have to create these rules for a class, whereas probably 20, 40 years before, every kid would have had that deeply ingrained by parents before they ever stepped in a classroom.

**Andrew Pudewa:** But you know that you teach at the point of need.

**Julie Walker:** Yep. Exactly right. This next one is something that he sometimes gets some criticism for. And I understand that. He says, “Always say thank you when given something.” Now this list just ends right there. Always say thank you, which is of course the whole gratitude thing. But he says “Within three seconds, or I'm going to take it back.”

**Andrew Pudewa:** It's probably one of those things like running with weights or, you know how some English teachers would say, write your whole paper without using be verbs, is, are, was, or were. Not because that is a thing that you want to always do forever. The purpose of running with weights, the purpose of writing under a certain constraint is to build the muscles. So that idea of within three seconds is to build the muscle of habit. You probably would relax that rule, especially if you want people to start to find different ways of saying thank you.

**Julie Walker:** I love that. Yep. That's good. "Surprise others by performing random acts of kindness." Remember that one time that your wife had a problem with a cell phone and she went into the Apple store.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And they just gave her a new phone.

**Julie Walker:** And they gave her a new phone.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah, Apple has these kind of weird policies, like let's surprise and delight customers so they hate us less.

**Julie Walker:** Well, and I, I know that you came out of that pretty impressed that she was able to...

**Andrew Pudewa:** I'm always looking at how businesses balance things like that. Obviously, Apple isn't going to do that and just give everybody a new whatever every anytime they have a problem. And we try to do that here too.

**Julie Walker:** Yes, absolutely.

**Andrew Pudewa:** What do we call it? Give them the pickle or something?

**Julie Walker:** Well, okay, it is called "Give Him the Pickle," and I'll have to put a link in the show notes. This is from a story of Bob Farrell.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh, and the ice cream parlor!

**Julie Walker:** Ice cream parlor, and he wrote a whole customer service training program on how to take good care of your customers. And sometimes when a customer wants extra pickles for their hamburger, just give them the pickle. You don't have to charge them for it.

**Andrew Pudewa:** It sounds like he was catering particularly to pregnant mothers. Ice cream and pickles, like, what's the combination there?

**Julie Walker:** Could be. One of his rules is "do not ask for a reward."

**Andrew Pudewa:** That's a tough one for kids, isn't it? Because they're always thinking, what's in it for me? What do I get? My grandchildren were spending the night, five year old granddaughter. She sees that the kitchen floor is a little crumb filled. And in particular, I don't know who designed this house, but there's a heating vent on the floor, right next to the stove where you're cooking. And so this heating vent, it just gets full of gunk. Bad decision. I always cover that with a throw rug. But nevertheless, junk gets in there. And so I lifted it up because something fell in there. And then she sees it's all filled with gunk. And so she says, I'll clean that for you.

**Julie Walker:** Aw.

**Andrew Pudewa:** If you give me one...penny.

**Julie Walker:** Oh.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And I thought, this is a good deal, but what's the lesson?

**Julie Walker:** Yep. Another rule. "Greet visitors and make them feel welcome."

**Andrew Pudewa:** I think schools do this pretty decently well. I would say almost every school I've been in, the schools I've been in are the type that would try to reinforce this behavior, but you walk in and then all the students sometimes they'll even stand up, but at least they'll say, "Good morning, Mr. Pudewa" or whatever. And that is a very important basic hospitality that goes to the ancient world.

**Julie Walker:** So true, Andrew. So I taught in middle school. for one semester. And then they were so gracious and moved me down into the primary grade. So I taught first and second grade for several years. And I spent a lot of time those first couple weeks training students. This is how you stand in line. This is where you sit. This is what, how you walk into class. This is where you put your book bag. This is where you hang up your jacket. This is how you go into the restroom and wash your hands. Just so that they knew, and I never taught them that part. I like that. Stand up when Mr. Branch walks into the room and greet him. How kind that would be. How sweet that would be. How impressive that would have been for my students to be able to demonstrate that they're well behaved. I love that.

**Andrew Pudewa:** One thing your comment about that reminds me is that we all deeply crave to know. The order, the system, the rules, but we live in a world today where people have been kind of caused to be allergic to rules. Like people think, well, rules are going to impinge on my freedom. So a dress code, I can't wear whatever I want. A speech code, I can't say whatever I want. That creates chaos.

And if you're dealing with roomfuls of seven year olds, chaos will be contagious, right? If you teach someone this is where you put your stuff and everybody practices that and their stuff goes in the place where it's supposed to be every day, and you don't have to remind people, life is better. And if you don't, everybody's stuff is all over the place, and you're constantly having to rehabilitate your environment to where it's tolerable. And what interests me is this deep level desire that we have to know the rules. Children illustrate this quite well, but it's a lifelong thing. And it kind of reminds me of Jordan Peterson, his book, what's the title of his book? The first one,

**Julie Walker:** Twelve rules.

**Andrew Pudewa:** 12 Rules for Life, An Antidote to Chaos,

**Julie Walker:** I love that. Yep.

**Andrew Pudewa:** right?

And then his second book, 12 More Rules, right? Well, why? There's something deeply satisfying and ordering when we know what to do, and then we can be more productive and more creative and, and more free. Rules really create a freedom from chaos and disorganization and the burden of that.

**Julie Walker:** I remember when I was that young school teacher, Dr. Dobson was a big name in parenting and education and he said, don't smile until Thanksgiving. Basically the idea is, set your classroom in order. And I don't think he actually meant that because no student wants to walk into a grumpy teacher. They want to walk into a bright smile.

**Andrew Pudewa:** The point is, and I've said this, if you start strict, especially in terms of the structure and style and the double spacing and the format your paper this way and don't turn it in unless it meets these criteria, that if you start strict, later you can relax some rules or overlook some things. And you're fine. But if you don't start strict, everyone will just stomp all over the system.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And I wonder if Ron Clark would have liked our structure and style approach to teaching writing. I think so.

**Julie Walker:** I, I, I absolutely agree with you, Andrew, and he now has been, he's received so many awards. He was on Oprah Winfrey. He's a big name. Truth be told, I actually invited him to join us on this podcast, but he probably didn't even see my little message where I reached out.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Too, too famous for us.

**Julie Walker:** Too famous for us, but he's got his own Ron Clark Academy. We should have our schools division reach out to them and see, "Hey, you want to try..."

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh, so he's running a school now?

**Julie Walker:** Yeah, he does. He runs the school. Yep. Okay. Back to this list. And of course, like I said at the beginning, I'm not going to get through all 55 of them. I just picked out a few that I thought were remarkable. "After dining in the cafeteria or elsewhere, be responsible for your trash, and I suppose by extension, plate." And this, I had my grandchildren staying with me for a few days, and I taught them what I taught my boys growing up. And that is when you're all done eating, you say, "That was a good meal, mom. May I be excused? Only, they wouldn't say that. They'd say, "That was a good meal, Dinga!" They call me Dinga. It's a word that they came up with and so it's my own, it's my grandma name. "May I be excused?" And then I decide whether or not I'm going to excuse them based on do we just need to have pleasant conversation at the table a little bit longer or is it okay for you to leave? And then when they leave, they get down, they push in their chair, and they take their dishes and for them, they just put it in the sink.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I think a lot of young parents may perceive that type of thing as being just too authoritarian, too rigid, too controlling of children. But isn't the goal for them to learn to control themselves? So that as teenagers, they have a sense of, is it appropriate for me to leave? or should I be sitting here politely, continuing a conversation, waiting for other people to finish, etc?

And I think too many people, if they don't have that when they're young, they're not going to acquire it easily later on. Kind of the one that cracked me up on the list is "When answering the phone at home, say your name and be polite and appropriate." I just realized. None of my grandchildren live in a home with a phone anymore, but it was a good skill. So, people who did grow up having to answer the phone in an appropriate way and being taught by parents



and, I guess, supported by teachers, well, that's a professional skill, whereas a lot of kids, I don't know, they may pick up the phone. Actually, a lot of them don't just pick up the phone. Like, it's rude to call people.

**Julie Walker:** Yeah. Don't call people. You just text them first. Right. All right. Just a couple more just along this, this idea of respect and gratitude. I mean, basic one, "Never cut in line." I mean, wow. What does that mean?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, or at least ask,

**Julie Walker:** But what about all the people behind you that you've now cut in front of as well?

**Andrew Pudewa:** You only need to get permission from the person you're going to stand in front of. I do think we have to be careful when creating rules that we create rules that are very concrete, always possible to achieve. "No matter the circumstances, always be honest."

**Julie Walker:** I love that one.

**Andrew Pudewa:** That probably is one of the greatest life lessons that people learn.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And, again, unfortunately, many people don't. They look at honesty as being only when it benefits them.

**Julie Walker:** Or only if they got caught do they have to admit that they had done something wrong.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So, anyway, yeah, I think, so you would recommend this book to whom? You obviously liked it.

**Julie Walker:** I did. I like it. I do believe it has universal appeal. Just like you said, we have to be critical as we're reading the book in the sense that we need to be thinking people and saying, yeah, this doesn't apply to my situation. But certainly classroom teachers, certainly parents, certainly even bosses to have an expectation at work.

This is the goofiest thing and maybe I'll just end with this little story. We have. coffee in our office. We have really good coffee. Someone, the boss of everything here, insists that we have fair trade organic coffee that is whole bean that we grind and brew right here in the office.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I'm very grateful that we do.

**Julie Walker:** Yes, but sometimes we run out on a Monday morning. We might run out soon and we have a way of notifying others of opening up the lid so that people know. Oh, don't try and pull from that pot. It's an airpot. Make a new pot instead, and so it's just kind of a rule of etiquette and refill the hot water kettle for tea and just kind of thinking of the preciousness of others, being grateful for them, compliment them when they do something well.

See, I would say that a lot of his rules apply even in the workplace, in families, in any time there's more than a bunch of people together.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I think for a classroom having fifty-five rules that you announce to everybody and try and enforce all year and that's a lot of rules. I have noticed though a very interesting one. We've been working with the Hillsdale K12 and co-publishing and so I've had a chance to go into a few different of the Hillsdale-affiliated schools. And the ones I've been in, so I don't know if it's every school, but the ones I've been in all have the same poster on the wall. If I recall correctly, it's the word think in an acronym. So, is it thoughtful? Like, before you speak, this is what you're supposed to go, is it thoughtful? Is it honest? Is it interesting? Is it necessary, or is it kind? And if it doesn't meet one or more of those, should you really say it?

I think I got “the think thing” correct. Someone's gonna say, “No, you got the I wrong or whatever.” But I do like things that are simpler, clearer, easier to reinforce on a daily basis. If we had a style checklist with fifty-five things on it, well, first of all, It'd just be way over painful. It'd be extremely hard to enforce. So I would say a teacher who looks at this list or gets the book would be best to glean what they can and maybe simplify or combine a few just to make it more manageable.

**Julie Walker:** And if you're introducing a rule, teach it and reinforce it and require it, right? I think of our checklist. If it's on the checklist, it's a requirement. It's not a suggestion. So as much as possible, I think what we have done here at IEW kind of dovetails with this idea of appropriate, yes, you're right. We do not have fifty-five things on our checklist, but I think overall,

**Andrew Pudewa:** One of these reminds me of a joke.

**Julie Walker:** Okay, good. Let's end with a joke.

**Andrew Pudewa:** It's on his list that you gave me here, 36. “Hold the door for people rather than letting it close on them.”

There was a very elderly male senator who was holding the door in the Capitol building for a younger, kind of more feminist oriented lawmaker. And she said, “You don't have to hold the door for me just because I'm a woman.” And he said, “Madam, I do not hold the door for you because you are a woman. I hold the door for you because I am a gentleman.”

**Julie Walker:** Aww, I like that.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Which is sweet. So be a gentleman.

**Julie Walker:** Be a gentleman. Thank you, Andrew.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Thank you.

**Julie Walker:** Thanks so much for joining us. If you enjoyed this episode and want to hear more, please subscribe to our podcast in iTunes, Google podcasts, Stitcher, or Spotify. Or just visit us each week at [IEW.com/podcast](http://IEW.com/podcast). Here you can also find show notes and relevant links from today's broadcast. One last thing: would you mind going to iTunes to rate and review our podcast? This really helps other smart, caring listeners like you find us. Thanks so much.