



# Be Bad First: Get Good at Things Fast to Stay Ready for the Future

*Erika Andersen*

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We are operating in a world defined by constant connection, rapid change, and abundant choices. News that once took months, even years, to spread now reaches across the globe in seconds. Advances in medicine and science are pushing boundaries with gene therapy and stem cell transplants. And decisions about where and how to work and live are nearly endless.

As new knowledge—and the possibilities that arise from that knowledge—propels us forward, leadership readiness expert and renowned author Erika Andersen suggests that success in today's world requires the ability to acquire new knowledge and skills quickly and continuously—in spite of our mixed feelings about being a novice.

In her newest book, *Be Bad First*, Erika explores how we can become *masters of mastery*; proficient in the kind of high-payoff learning that's needed today. With assessments and exercises at the close of every chapter, she encourages readers to embrace being bad on the way to being great—to be novices over and over again as we seek to learn and acquire the new skills that will allow us to thrive in this fast-changing world.

## **Be Bad First: Get Good at Things Fast to Stay Ready for the Future Details**

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## From Reader Review *Be Bad First: Get Good at Things Fast to Stay Ready for the Future* for online ebook

### C. Hollis Crossman says

If there's one thing we hear consistently from voices in the business world today, it's that change is the only constant going forward. That means the only way to stay viable within virtually any market or profession is to adapt, evolve, and learn constantly. But saying these things and doing them are two wildly different propositions.

Erika Andersen provides some much-needed practical guidance for pursuing success in this rapid-innovation environment. *Be Bad First* is about preparing yourself to learn new things despite the deep antipathy most of us feel toward the novice state that accompanies acquiring new skills or knowledge. In other words, we hate to get good at things because it requires being bad first, and that means being embarrassed, judged by others, shown to be less knowledgeable than we'd have others believe, etc.

Except, maybe not. Andersen points out that these are certainly things we tell ourselves, but that in reality people are more likely to respect those willing to acquire new skills, and to regard them as confident, than they are to dismiss or mock them. Regardless of how others react, however, the main point of this book is that we need to adjust our own expectations and perspective in order to adopt a posture of rapid and sustained agility.

The means to this end is a fourfold path consisting of aspiration, neutral self-awareness, endless curiosity, and willingness to be bad first (which Andersen parlays into an infuriating acronym—ANEW). We have to really want to learn a new skill to be able to pursue it; we must be clear about our own abilities and shortcomings; we need to activate our own curiosity; and we have to come to terms with the fact that we'll be bad at first, but that with sustained effort we'll get better and that it will all pay off in the end.

Andersen is a corporate leadership coach, and so some of her advice is a little hokey. For instance, she characterizes what is largely just self-awareness as "self-talk" and uses phrases like "the self-talk of self-belief" to inspire her readers. If you can look past the power of positive thinking vibe, her principles are pretty sound. However, she does veer dangerously close to magical thinking at times, though without ever crossing the line entirely.

A number of helpful exercises guide readers through each of the principles, and the story of the artist Michelangelo is woven through the text as an example of how a constant attitude of learning and willingness to be a beginner many times over can translate into great gains. The ideas in this book aren't groundbreaking, really, but Andersen has a knack for presenting them as if they are, and for showing readers how their own ideas about their ability to acquire new skills is holding them back. A good book for any type of learner, but especially for entrepreneurs and professionals.

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### Erika Andersen says

I probably shouldn't say this (it's like saying that you like one of your children better than another), but this is my favorite book I've written so far. See what you think...

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### **Adrean Clark says**

LOVE this book - it has helped me so much to get past my internal blocks!

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### **Dhanshree Pathak says**

I want read now

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### **Monica says**

If I could assign a required reading book to my staff, colleagues, family, and friends -- this book would be it.

In this day and age of constant change we can only remain informed, educated, relevant, and ready if we are able to learn and grow and apply those new skills -- and do it quickly. This book covers the steps needed to do these things and I recommend it highly! The author of this book was the keynote at my annual conference this summer and I was inspired by her presentation and by the process described in this book, her websites, and blog.

For those of you who know me, I do not buy many books -- being a librarian, I don't often need to, but this one is a must have for my shelf. I expect to refer to it regularly throughout my life. Join me in being bad first!

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### **Robins Varghese says**

Very insightful run down on ANEW - the acronym that will take you to achieving more than you thought possible.

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### **Wendy Bunnell says**

I sandwiched this business self-help book between a couple novels because I needed to read it for work, but it really was a nice change of pace. Ok, let's clarify, I didn't really "need" to read it for work. I voluntarily signed up for the "Reader Leaders" group because I like reading and it's a good excuse to: 1.) get a book from work, 2.) have an excuse to be reading a book at work (even though I read this entirely on a Saturday and Sunday - oh well), and 3.) it allows me to spend an hour at work talking about a book with people that I don't usually work with directly, so a break from drafting contracts and see some different people - whee!

I've read a bunch of different management / workplace skills books, many of them for Reader Leaders over the years, and this was better than most. It kept moving, made a concrete number of points, and seemed to be leading to a process for expanding our skills. Her four steps (ANEW) in achieving this goal of having readers be essentially ready, willing and able to take on learning new skills make sense and seem implementable. I think it could be really simplified into being open and honest with ourselves that there are things in the world that we can still learn (that we're not already experts at), that there are reasons / motivations that we'd want to

learn them, to be honest with ourselves about where our current weaknesses lie, and that in the process of learning, we won't get everything perfect the first time we try, so we need to be patient and humble as we stumble towards competence and possibly eventual mastery. I like these concepts.

The author uses the example of Michelangelo painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel throughout each chapter, as he was initially reluctant to take that project, needed to develop new skills, but was able to muster the enthusiasm and skills needed to do a bang-up job. Actually, some of the quotes from Michelangelo make him pretty much the ideal subject for this topic, so that was cool. I wish we'd had some more "famous" or at least known examples, as most of the rest of her examples were from clients or hypothetical situations. And, because I'd just seen a trailer for the new "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles" movie, for which Michelangelo is a main turtle character, I kept hearing the music from that trailer in my head. That sounds like a me problem rather than a defect of the book though. The reference to "Stranger in a Strange Land" also sent me down a mental tangent. Not because her reference to the Fair Witness concept wasn't apt - it was. Rather the reference to Robert Heinlein brings so much sexist baggage, I went down into a spiral of thinking about super-annoying and dated sci-fi writers I have read (Philip K. Dick, don't think you're getting off Scot free here either). Well, it was an interesting little break from this subject matter. Back to the book.

In a self-assessment, I think my greatest strength coming into this type of self-improvement is "Endless Curiosity" as I do want to dig into and figure out so many things, things that other people find boring and useless. Exhibit A, I signed up for Leader Readers and read this book on my weekend by choice, and I'd do it again (well, not this book, but you get the point). I don't need to preach to the Goodreads choir that people who making reading a big part of their lives are more curious than the mass of humanity who gets all of their information from some other person or device, pre-digested, no original thought required. My biggest challenge is "Neutral Self-Awareness" which (ironically, because I'm obviously aware of it), I do think I'm better at things than other people do. That is something that I can work on. If I didn't have things to work on, and new things to learn, then what really is the point?

Overall, pretty good book. I little repetitive on the main points, but I think the author took a class on presentation (same class I took maybe) that said that audiences need repetition for things to sink in. To which I say, well, MOST audiences. I took a class recently where the instructor stated as fact that "no-one can multi-task" and "people are incapable of using the same parts of their brains for two tasks simultaneous." I raised my hand and mentioned: "Did you know, President Garfield could right in Greek with one hand and Latin in the other at the same time?" I don't like over-generalizations, or smug advice, but this book was decent.

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### **Ietrio says**

This book comes from somebody who was with Michelangelo when he was negotiating and hence had a lot of time to analyze Michelangelo's technique.

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### **Amanda Gill says**

This was recommended by a colleague. I guess there is good info here if you need it. However, I gobble up information and love to learn new things and really don't need a book to encourage me to do so. I'm sure there are people out there that would benefit from this, but the whole time I was reading it, I kept thinking, "Duh. I do this already. Who doesn't?!"

## Jean-Philippe Michel says

Erika Anderson proposes that the ability to learn well and quickly is the most important skill to have. Unfortunately, not knowing something feels so... bad. This is because we like the familiar and don't like going back to a novice state. Given how uncomfortable learning can feel, how can we overcome our resistance so that we can reach our goals?

Anderson proposes a four-step model for effective learning, which follows the acronym A.N.E.W.:

- Aspiration: We are motivated to learn some things more than others. For those things that motivate us less, we need to figure out how acquiring the new capability will benefit us (WIFM – What's in it for me). In addition, we need to envision a future where we reap those benefits. Without these two exercises, we may miss the motivation we need to persevere when the learning gets tough.
- Neutral Self-Awareness: To learn effectively, we need to 1) be accurate about where we're starting from; 2) observe our progress neutrally and 3) manage our negative self-talk.
- Endless Curiosity: We can build on our natural curiosity by finding our curiosity sparks, fanning our curiosity flames (with positive self-talk and easy actions) and by feeding the fire of curiosity daily.
- Willingness to be Bad First: We need to get comfortable with being uncomfortable. Although we dislike going back to a novice state, it is the best way to learn and grow. This requires us to simultaneously acknowledge weakness and be confident: "I'm bad, but I'll get better. I'll work at this."

The goal of Be Bad First is help you become a better learner, especially for things that you are less motivated to learn. Once you identify something new and challenging that you want to learn, I encourage you to try to plan your learning using the ANEW model. There are worksheets on Erika's website that can help you do just that: <https://www.proteusleader.com/topics/...>

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