Aaron Levie's FDE reading recommendation: turn deployment pain into product discovery

Recommended Reading from Tech Founders

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The strongest recommendation is an essay on forward-deployed engineers that Aaron Levie endorses as a guide to AI deployments where the workflow is still being invented. Tim Ferriss and Paul Graham add two compact recommendations: an 80/20 audit and Rob Miles's general-but-novel operating principles.

The standout recommendation

Title: *To FDE, or not to FDE?* [1]
Type: Article
Creator: @thejessezhang
Recommended by: Aaron Levie (@levie) [2]

Levie calls it a "good post" because AI introduces a non-deterministic, rapidly changing system into workflows that often have never been automated. He highlights the resulting need for customer-process change, customization, constant evaluations, model updates, and iteration. [2]

The essay's practical framework is to deploy engineers directly with customers when a category is genuinely new: observe failures, discover the workflow, and turn that pain into product. Once the user journeys are understood, companies should remove the FDE dependency; otherwise bespoke work keeps margins capped and growth tied to hiring. [1] The useful distinction is between FDE-led discovery and implementation against a known specification. The article's test is blunt: use FDEs to determine what the product needs to become; if they keep excreting more pain, the company has a services business rather than a product motion. [1]

Tim Ferriss's 80/20 diagnostic

Title: Pareto's work—the 80/20 lens [3]
Type: Framework / work
Creator: Pareto; Ferriss does not identify a specific title or edition
Link: No link supplied in the post
Recommended by: Tim Ferriss

Ferriss recounts discovering Pareto's work while working 15-hour days and facing burnout. He then audited his business and personal life with two questions: which 20% of sources create 80% of his problems, and which 20% generate 80% of his desired outcomes? [3]

The recommendation is valuable as a usable reading lens rather than a generic productivity slogan: eliminate the sources producing disproportionate harm and multiply the strengths producing disproportionate results. [3]

Paul Graham's creator recommendation: Rob Miles

Title: Rob Miles's X posts—illustrated by "Never pay someone to remove a problem that they themselves created" [4]
Type: X posts / creator to follow
Creator: Rob Miles
Link: Example post [5]
Recommended by: Paul Graham

Graham says Rob Miles is worth following because he delivers insights that are both "very general" and "novel," then points readers to the example principle above. [5, 4] Graham qualifies the endorsement: novelty is relative, but the principle is not widely appreciated. [6] That gives readers a clear filter for the account's value—look for operating principles that generalize beyond one situation without collapsing into familiar conventional wisdom.

Sources

1. X article by @thejessezhang
2. X post by @levie
3. X post by @tferriss
4. X post by @robertskmiles
5. X post by @paulg
6. X post by @paulg