AI recommendations that turn anxiety into accountability, agency, and practice

Recommended Reading from Tech Founders

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The strongest organic recommendations connect AI governance to product behavior and human agency, then move from attention and strategic practice to a concentrated company-building reading list.

The clearest action-oriented read

New York Times opinion article on closed AI-model rhetoric

- **Type / creator:** Opinion article from *The New York Times*; the recommendation does not provide the headline or byline. **Link:** NYT article
- **Recommended by:** Bill Gurley.
- **Takeaway:** Gurley calls it a "great piece" explaining the "seemingly contradictory rhetoric" from closed AI-model companies. He endorses its number-one actionable takeaway: hold those companies accountable for their products' behavior. [1]
- **Why it matters:** This is the most usable filter in the set: evaluate a model company by what its product does, not only by how it frames itself. [1]

An Alien Mind

- **Type / creator:** Essay by Jakub, hosted at OpenAI. **Link:** *An Alien Mind*
- **Recommended by:** Sam Altman, who called it "an important post." [2]
- **Takeaway:** Jakub says the essay examines the state of AI, his concerns about the next few years, and the choices needed to keep the future in humanity's hands. [3]

- **Why it matters:** It adds a human-agency lens to the AI conversation: the question is not only what models can do, but what choices shape who controls the future. [3]

Two practical exercises

Ajahn Brahm's three-minute "how to stop thinking" demonstration

- **Type / creator:** Video demonstration shared in Darshak Rana's X post, featuring Ajahn Brahm.
- **Recommended by:** Patrick O'Shaughnessy, who called it "one of the better exercises of this type" he had seen. [4]
- **Takeaway:** Rather than trying to force the mind to go blank, the exercise directs attention to the gaps between words—the silence between syllables and sentences. The post says that this diversion lets mental quiet emerge as a side effect. [5]
- **Why it matters:** It turns the vague instruction to "clear your mind" into a concrete attentional technique, while keeping the stronger neuroscience claims in the original post appropriately attributable to it. [5]

Zach Dell's two-notebook idea, via David Senra

- **Type / creator:** Operating-practice post with an embedded video by David Senra, describing Zach Dell's system. **Link:** Senra's post
- **Recommended by:** Elad Gil, who called it "so good" and linked the post. [6]
- **Takeaway:** A red notebook is for working *in* the business—day-to-day problems and near-term issues. A black notebook is for working *on* the business—six- to twelve-month planning, strategic war-gaming, and big ideas. Dell protects the latter as phone- and computer-free time at home. [7]
- **Why it matters:** It is a simple operating boundary between urgent execution and deliberate strategy, rather than another productivity system that treats both kinds of work as interchangeable. [7]

A compact company-building syllabus

The Lenny's Podcast episode introduces Anish Acharya as an a16z general partner and longtime product builder and founder; in its lightning round, he is explicitly asked which books he recommends most. [8] The full discussion is in the interview.

- **Conquests and Cultures — Thomas Sowell** *(book).* Acharya calls it his favorite book, praising its account of how conquest drives cultural change and its view of culture as a major driver of outcomes. [8] **Why it matters:** It is a lens for asking how cultural context—not just product or strategy—shapes results.

- **Seven Powers — Hamilton Helmer** *(book).* Acharya describes it as an intellectual distillation of business moats and compounding advantages. [8] **Why it matters:** It is the most directly relevant recommendation here for testing durability and compounding in a company-building thesis.
- **Increasing Returns to Scale — Brian Arthur** *(textbook).* Mark Andreessen sent it to Acharya after Acharya asked what he should read. Acharya values its dense explanation of why software has unusually large economic effects and says it helped him understand the industry, its culture, and its positive-sum dynamics. [8] **Why it matters:** It supplies an economic explanation for why software businesses and the technology industry behave differently from ordinary businesses.
- **Hard Things — Ben Horowitz** *(book; title as spoken in the episode).* Acharya calls it the first emotionally honest book about business and says founders value seeing that anxiety, failure, and uncertainty are shared experiences. [8] **Why it matters:** It is a counterweight to sanitized founder narratives, making the psychological cost of company-building part of the operating picture rather than an invisible personal failure.

Sources

1. X post by @bgurley
2. X post by @sama
3. X post by @merettm
4. X post by @patrick_oshag
5. X post by @thedarshakrana
6. X post by @eladgil
7. X post by @davidsenra
8. Why companies are becoming a series of loops | Anish Acharya (a16z)