Apple in China, Rickover, and Zach Dell's Learning Stack

Recommended Reading from Tech Founders

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The clearest recommendation today is Patrick McGee's Apple in China, which Shyam Sankar uses to argue that industrial capability is built through deliberate investment. The rest of the list clusters around military builders, U.S.-China framing, and Zach Dell's mix of worldview and learning-method resources.

Most compelling recommendation: *Apple in China*

This stands out because it comes with a concrete mechanism, not just praise. Shyam Sankar recommends Patrick McGee's *Apple in China* to argue that manufacturing talent and industrial capacity are built through sustained investment, citing Apple's inflation-adjusted spending in China as his evidence [1].

- **Content type:** Book [1]
- **Author/creator:** Patrick McGee [1]
- **Who recommended it:** Shyam Sankar [1]
- **Key takeaway:** Sankar uses the book to rebut claims that the U.S. simply lacks machine-tool engineers; his point is that Apple invested heavily to build talent and capacity in China [1]
- **Why it matters:** It turns a broad debate about competitiveness into a specific case study of how capability gets created [1]

  > Apple has spent the equivalent on an inflation adjusted basis in the last five years of two and a half Marshall Plans building talent and capacity in China. How about we try to spend one Marshall Plan here?

[1]

Why Great Builders are Heretics | Palantir CTO (54:18)

Builder and strategy reads

Rickover's personal memoirs

- **Content type:** Book [1]
- **Author/creator:** Hyman Rickover [1]
- **Who recommended it:** Shyam Sankar [1]
- **Key takeaway:** Sankar points readers to Rickover's memoirs to see how he channeled humiliation into motivation while pushing ahead on nuclear submarines despite opposition [1]
- **Why it matters:** It is a firsthand builder account of how one difficult operator handled institutional resistance [1]

Biography of John Boyd

- **Content type:** Biography [1]
- **Author/creator:** Not specified in the source material [1]
- **Who recommended it:** Patrick O'Shaughnessy [1]
- **Key takeaway:** Patrick describes it as one of the great biographies of a military figure he has read and highlights Boyd's invention of the OODA Loop [1]
- **Why it matters:** It pairs a life story with a named decision framework Patrick explicitly calls out [1]

Destined for War with China

- **Content type:** Book [1]
- **Author/creator:** Graham Allison [1]
- **Who recommended it:** Patrick O'Shaughnessy [1]
- **Key takeaway:** Patrick says he reviewed notes from the book before the conversation to frame how he thinks about China as an adversary and as a country [1]
- **Why it matters:** It is presented as active preparation for a current geopolitical discussion, not as a generic reading-list item [1]

Zach Dell's learning stack

Zach Dell surfaced four resources in the materials for his Generalist interview [2]. The source material gives less commentary on these picks, so the signal is mainly in the shape of the list itself.

Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong About the World–and Why Things Are Better Than You Think

- **Content type:** Book [2]
- **Author/creator:** Not specified in the source material [2]
- **Link/URL:** amazon.com/Factfulness-Reasons-World-Things-Better/dp/1250107814 [2]
- **Who recommended it:** Zach Dell [2]
- **Key takeaway:** The title frames it as a corrective to common misreadings of the world [2]
- **Why it matters:** Within Dell's four picks, it is the broadest worldview recommendation [2]

Robert Greene's books

- **Content type:** Books / author body of work [2]
- **Author/creator:** Robert Greene [2]
- **Link/URL:** amazon.com/stores/Robert-Greene/author/B001IGV3IS [2]
- **Who recommended it:** Zach Dell [2]
- **Key takeaway:** Dell recommends Greene's work as a body of books rather than pointing to one specific title [2]
- **Why it matters:** It is the only pick in today's set framed as an author's broader catalog [2]

Childhoods of exceptional people

- **Content type:** Article / blog post [2]
- **Author/creator:** Not specified in the source material [2]
- **Link/URL:** henrikkarlsson.xyz/p/childhoods [2]
- **Who recommended it:** Zach Dell [2]

- **Key takeaway:** The piece focuses on the childhoods of exceptional people [2]
- **Why it matters:** It adds a development-focused lens alongside worldview and learning-method reads [2]

Feynman Technique: The Ultimate Guide to Learning Anything Faster

- **Content type:** Article [2]
- **Author/creator:** Not specified in the source material [2]
- **Link/URL:** fs.blog/feynman-technique [2]
- **Who recommended it:** Zach Dell [2]
- **Key takeaway:** It is a direct recommendation on learning anything faster through the Feynman Technique [2]
- **Why it matters:** It is Dell's clearest explicitly process-oriented learning resource [2]

Pattern across today's recommendations

No single resource was repeated by multiple leaders, but the day's picks cluster cleanly. Sankar's recommendations focus on industrial and military builders, Patrick's on strategy and China, and Dell's on learning, worldview, and the development of exceptional people [1, 2].

Sources

1. Why Great Builders are Heretics | Palantir CTO
2. America's Electric Power Grid Is Broken. This Startup Is Trying to Fix It. (Zach Dell, co-founder & CEO of Base)