

Career-shaping reads from Brian Armstrong and Jenny Wen: Bitcoin’s white paper, long-arc thinking, and execution

Recommended Reading from Tech Founders

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A high-signal set of authentic recommendations from Brian Armstrong and Anthropropic design leader Jenny Wen, anchored by the Bitcoin white paper as a career-shaping catalyst. Also included: decision and long-horizon reads (The Dip, The Power Broker), organizational culture framing (The Coddling of the American Mind), and a few perspective-building film/TV picks.

Most compelling recommendation (career-shaping)

Bitcoin white paper (research paper) — *Satoshi Nakamoto*

- **Link/URL (to the resource itself):** Not provided in the source
- **Recommended by:** Brian Armstrong (Co-founder/CEO, Coinbase)
- **Where it was recommended:** My Conversation With Brian Armstrong, Co-founder & CEO of Coinbase (YouTube) ¹
- **Key takeaway (as shared):** Armstrong describes reading the Bitcoin white paper in **December 2010** after experiences with Argentina’s hyperinflation and seeing cross-border payout frictions at Airbnb; he says it sharpened his conviction that the world would benefit from a **fast, cheap, permissionless, decentralized** global financial system—and that this is the context in which he first read the white paper and began working on a Coinbase prototype nights and weekends ².

¹My Conversation With Brian Armstrong, Co-founder & CEO of Coinbase

²My Conversation With Brian Armstrong, Co-founder & CEO of Coinbase

- **Why it matters:** This is a direct example of a founder pointing to a single primary-source document as the catalyst for both a worldview shift (how broken global finance feels in practice) and an early product effort ³.



My Conversation With Brian Armstrong, Co-founder & CEO of Coinbase (32:01)

Additional founder recommendations (Brian Armstrong)

The Dip (book) — *Seth Godin*

- **Link/URL:** Not provided in the source
- **Recommended by:** Brian Armstrong
- **Where it was recommended:** My Conversation With Brian Armstrong, Co-founder & CEO of Coinbase (YouTube) ⁴
- **Key takeaway (as shared):** Armstrong describes *The Dip* as a clarifying lens for deciding what he cared enough about to pursue for decades; he used it to evaluate and ultimately shut down short-term efforts (e.g., real estate/other projects) and commit to **tech entrepreneurship**, including moving to Silicon Valley ⁵.

³My Conversation With Brian Armstrong, Co-founder & CEO of Coinbase

⁴My Conversation With Brian Armstrong, Co-founder & CEO of Coinbase

⁵My Conversation With Brian Armstrong, Co-founder & CEO of Coinbase

- **Why it matters:** It's framed as a decision tool for long-horizon commitment—choosing the work you'd do even without near-term success ⁶.

PayPal Wars (book) — *not specified in the source excerpt*

- **Link/URL:** Not provided in the source
- **Recommended by:** Brian Armstrong
- **Where it was recommended:** My Conversation With Brian Armstrong, Co-founder & CEO of Coinbase (YouTube) ⁷
- **Key takeaway (as shared):** Armstrong points to the book's account of early PayPal leaders (e.g., Peter Thiel, Max Levchin, David Sacks) pursuing ideas he describes as similar to Bitcoin—attempting to build a **permissionless, global, internet-native** form of money—before PayPal ultimately evolved into more of a checkout/credit-card alternative ⁸.
- **Why it matters:** It's a historical reference for recurring attempts at internet-native money—and how business outcomes can diverge from original architectural ambitions ⁹.

The 4-Hour Workweek (book) — *Tim Ferriss*

- **Link/URL:** Not provided in the source
- **Recommended by:** Brian Armstrong
- **Where it was recommended:** My Conversation With Brian Armstrong, Co-founder & CEO of Coinbase (YouTube) ¹⁰
- **Key takeaway (as shared):** Armstrong cites Ferriss and *The 4-Hour Workweek* in the context of thinking about scalable/passive-income approaches; he connects it to early experiments like starting a tutoring company while in college ¹¹.
- **Why it matters:** It's presented as an early influence on how he approached side projects and leverage—before later committing fully to tech entrepreneurship ¹².

The Coddling of the American Mind (book) — *Jonathan Haidt*

- **Link/URL:** Not provided in the source
- **Recommended by:** Brian Armstrong
- **Where it was recommended:** My Conversation With Brian Armstrong, Co-founder & CEO of Coinbase (YouTube) ¹³

⁶My Conversation With Brian Armstrong, Co-founder & CEO of Coinbase

⁷My Conversation With Brian Armstrong, Co-founder & CEO of Coinbase

⁸My Conversation With Brian Armstrong, Co-founder & CEO of Coinbase

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- **Key takeaway (as shared):** Armstrong says he read Haidt’s book (and spoke with employees) to understand activist dynamics he perceived as moving from college campuses into the workforce—where some employees saw their role as “holding truth to power” and pushing broader societal reforms inside a company rather than focusing primarily on advancing the company mission ¹⁴.
- **Why it matters:** It’s an example of a CEO using a specific book to make sense of internal cultural dynamics and competing expectations of what “work” at a company should mean ¹⁵.

Design leader picks (Jenny Wen, Anthropic)

The Power Broker (book) — *Robert Caro*

- **Link/URL:** Not provided in the source
- **Recommended by:** Jenny Wen (Head of Design, Anthropic; ex-Figma Director of Design)
- **Where it was recommended:** The design process is dead. Here’s what’s replacing it. | Jenny Wen (YouTube) ¹⁶
- **Key takeaway (as shared):** Wen calls it an “aggressive recommendation” due to length (~1100 pages), but argues it’s worth reading end-to-end for **long-arc thinking**—seeing how someone changes over decades—and for understanding how a controversial figure (Robert Moses) “gets things done” ¹⁷.
- **Why it matters:** It’s positioned as an antidote to short attention spans and a practical study of power and execution over time ¹⁸.

Insomniac City (book) — *Bill Hayes*

- **Link/URL:** Not provided in the source
- **Recommended by:** Jenny Wen
- **Where it was recommended:** The design process is dead. Here’s what’s replacing it. | Jenny Wen (YouTube) ¹⁹
- **Key takeaway (as shared):** Wen recommends it as a “beautiful” and “ethereal” memoir tied to Oliver Sacks’ final years (via his partner Bill

¹⁴My Conversation With Brian Armstrong, Co-founder & CEO of Coinbase

¹⁵My Conversation With Brian Armstrong, Co-founder & CEO of Coinbase

¹⁶The design process is dead. Here’s what’s replacing it. | Jenny Wen (head of design at Claude)

¹⁷The design process is dead. Here’s what’s replacing it. | Jenny Wen (head of design at Claude)

¹⁸The design process is dead. Here’s what’s replacing it. | Jenny Wen (head of design at Claude)

¹⁹The design process is dead. Here’s what’s replacing it. | Jenny Wen (head of design at Claude)

Hayes), and says it prompts reflection on **mortality, love, and life** ²⁰.

- **Why it matters:** A non-work pick explicitly recommended for perspective-building rather than tactics—useful when you want a reset on what matters ²¹.

A Sentimental Value (film) — *Norwegian film; director also did “The Worst Person in the World” (as stated)*

- **Link/URL:** Not provided in the source
- **Recommended by:** Jenny Wen
- **Where it was recommended:** The design process is dead. Here’s what’s replacing it. | Jenny Wen (YouTube) ²²
- **Key takeaway (as shared):** Wen praises the film’s subtle pacing/writing and character relationships; she describes it as a family drama where the house functions “sort of [as] a character” ²³.
- **Why it matters:** A craft-focused recommendation—highlighting storytelling mechanics (pacing, character dynamics, setting-as-character) ²⁴.

The Pitt — Season 2 (TV season) — *not specified in the source excerpt*

- **Link/URL:** Not provided in the source
- **Recommended by:** Jenny Wen
- **Where it was recommended:** The design process is dead. Here’s what’s replacing it. | Jenny Wen (YouTube) ²⁵
- **Key takeaway (as shared):** Wen recommends it on the premise that “everybody just likes to watch people who are really competent at their jobs do something” ²⁶.
- **Why it matters:** A reminder that observing high-competence work (even fiction/documentary-style entertainment) can be intrinsically motivating and instructive ²⁷.

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Pattern worth noting: long-arc thinking over short-term noise

Both Armstrong and Wen explicitly frame certain picks as tools for **long-horizon clarity**—Armstrong using *The Dip* to decide what to commit to for decades ²⁸, and Wen recommending *The Power Broker* as an end-to-end study in long-arc change and execution over time ²⁹.

Sources

1. My Conversation With Brian Armstrong, Co-founder & CEO of Coinbase
2. The design process is dead. Here's what's replacing it. | Jenny Wen (head of design at Claude)

²⁸My Conversation With Brian Armstrong, Co-founder & CEO of Coinbase

²⁹The design process is dead. Here's what's replacing it. | Jenny Wen (head of design at Claude)