

Founder fundamentals: resilience under pressure, innovation “bibles,” and surprise-driven career thinking

Recommended Reading from Tech Founders

2026-02-27

Founder fundamentals: resilience under pressure, innovation “bibles,” and surprise-driven career thinking

By Recommended Reading from Tech Founders • February 27, 2026

Today’s strongest cluster is founder/operator fundamentals: two separate leaders pointed to *The Hard Thing About Hard Things* for managing psychology under pressure, alongside a “re-read forever” endorsement of Christensen’s innovation classics. Also included: Carse on embracing surprise, Balaji’s picks on regulators and political economy, and an unusually candid AI user interview video.

Most compelling recommendation: *The Hard Thing About Hard Things* — operating psychology when the job gets brutal

***The Hard Thing About Hard Things* (book) — Ben Horowitz**

- **Content type:** Book
- **Author/creator:** Ben Horowitz
- **Link/URL:** Not provided in sources (context: recommended in interviews)
- **Who recommended it:**
 - Jeetu Patel (on *Lenny’s Podcast*) ¹
 - Brian Halligan (in conversation with Horowitz) ²
- **Key takeaway (as shared):**

¹AI is critical for humanity’s survival: Cisco President on the AI revolution | Jeetu Patel

²Ben Horowitz On What Makes a Great Founder

- Patel highlighted the book as guidance for “**how you manage your psychology when things get hard.**”³
- Halligan said he read it while **running HubSpot**, “thought it was really good,” and referenced the book’s stance that it’s “**not a fan of the idea of hiring a COO.**”⁴⁵
- **Why it matters:** This is a rare “two independent operator endorsements” pattern—and both endorsements point to the same underlying value: decision-making and leadership *under stress*, not in ideal conditions.⁶⁷



AI is critical for humanity’s survival: Cisco President on the AI revolution / Jeetu Patel (79:29)

Strategy classics that leaders treat as foundational

The Innovator’s Dilemma + *The Innovator’s Solution* (books) — Clayton Christensen

- **Content type:** Books

³AI is critical for humanity’s survival: Cisco President on the AI revolution | Jeetu Patel

⁴Ben Horowitz On What Makes a Great Founder

⁵Ben Horowitz On What Makes a Great Founder

⁶AI is critical for humanity’s survival: Cisco President on the AI revolution | Jeetu Patel

⁷Ben Horowitz On What Makes a Great Founder

- **Author/creator:** Clayton Christensen
- **Link/URL:** Not provided in sources
- **Who recommended it:** Jeetu Patel ⁸
- **Key takeaway (as shared):** Patel called these books “**the Bible in Tech**” and said he recommends **re-reading them every few years**. ⁹
- **Why it matters:** A “re-read every few years” recommendation is a strong signal that the framework keeps paying off as markets, products, and roles change. ¹⁰

Source context: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yLNKlBlkFas> ¹¹

Investing + career: staying fluid and using surprise as an input

Finite and Infinite Games (book) — James Carse

- **Content type:** Book
- **Author/creator:** James Carse
- **Link/URL:** <https://www.generalist.com/p/infinite-games> ¹²
- **Who recommended it:** The Generalist author (while announcing he’s joining Hummingbird as a partner) ¹³
- **Key takeaway (as shared):**

“To be prepared against surprise is to be trained. To be prepared for surprise is to be educated.” ¹⁴
- **Why it matters:** The author explicitly ties the book to a career philosophy centered on **fluidity** and “allowing oneself to be surprised,” describing his own best paths as a mix of “shock and inevitability.” ¹⁵

Institutions, power, and governance: a regulator-focused reading pick

Reputation and Power (book) — Daniel Carpenter

- **Content type:** Book
- **Author/creator:** Daniel Carpenter
- **Link/URL:** Not provided in sources

⁸AI is critical for humanity’s survival: Cisco President on the AI revolution | Jeetu Patel

⁹AI is critical for humanity’s survival: Cisco President on the AI revolution | Jeetu Patel

¹⁰AI is critical for humanity’s survival: Cisco President on the AI revolution | Jeetu Patel

¹¹AI is critical for humanity’s survival: Cisco President on the AI revolution | Jeetu Patel

¹²Infinite Games

¹³Infinite Games

¹⁴Infinite Games

¹⁵Infinite Games

- **Who recommended it:** Balaji Srinivasan ¹⁶
- **Key takeaway (as shared):** Srinivasan called it a “**great book**” and noted it’s written by someone **more sympathetic to the FDA** than he is—then added that the FDA has “good aspects” and “bad aspects,” but these aren’t widely discussed, pointing out: “when’s the last time we elected the commissioner of the FDA?” ¹⁷
- **Why it matters:** It’s recommended as a way to reason about regulators via **reputation and institutional power**, including views that differ from the recommender’s priors. ¹⁸

Source context: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGCqe2fMO6s> ¹⁹

Political economy + elite psychology (two Balaji picks)

The Sovereign Individual (book)

- **Content type:** Book
- **Author/creator:** Not specified in sources
- **Link/URL:** Not provided in sources
- **Who recommended it:** Balaji Srinivasan ²⁰
- **Key takeaway (as shared):** He said he’s “sympathetic” to the **sovereign individual thesis** and **likes the book quite a lot**, while also saying he’s increasingly thinking about “the sovereign collective.” ²¹
- **Why it matters:** Recommended as a serious framing—even as the recommender signals an active evolution of the thesis toward collective forms. ²²

Born Rich (documentary film) — Jamie Johnson

- **Content type:** Documentary film
- **Author/creator:** Jamie Johnson
- **Link/URL:** Not provided in sources
- **Who recommended it:** Balaji Srinivasan ²³
- **Key takeaway (as shared):** Srinivasan described it as an “**interesting movie**” about Jamie Johnson (described as an heir to the Johnson & Johnson family) exploring **guilt about having lots of money**. ²⁴

¹⁶Balaji Srinivasan on building digital commonwealths (EP.43)

¹⁷Balaji Srinivasan on building digital commonwealths (EP.43)

¹⁸Balaji Srinivasan on building digital commonwealths (EP.43)

¹⁹Balaji Srinivasan on building digital commonwealths (EP.43)

²⁰Balaji Srinivasan on building digital commonwealths (EP.43)

²¹Balaji Srinivasan on building digital commonwealths (EP.43)

²²Balaji Srinivasan on building digital commonwealths (EP.43)

²³Balaji Srinivasan on building digital commonwealths (EP.43)

²⁴Balaji Srinivasan on building digital commonwealths (EP.43)

- **Why it matters:** A concrete, narrative-format recommendation for understanding how wealth and identity can interact—useful context for founders/investors who operate around extreme outcomes. ²⁵
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AI in the real world: an unpolished user interview worth watching

“User Interview #3” (video) — Avi Schiffmann

- **Content type:** Short video (posted on X)
 - **Author/creator:** Avi Schiffmann
 - **Link/URL:** <https://x.com/AviSchiffmann/status/2026798365489725742> ²⁶
 - **Who recommended it:** Garry Tan ²⁷
 - **Key takeaway (as shared):**
 - Tan emphasized it’s “**not the happy demo path**” and “it’s real.” ²⁸
 - The punchline he pulled out: “**AI: Doesn’t get tired, doesn’t ghost.**” ²⁹
 - **Why it matters:** A strong signal for people tracking AI adoption: the recommendation is explicitly about *authentic* usage and behavior in practice, not launch-video polish. ³⁰³¹
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Resurfaced signal: founder writing clarity as a diligence input

Amazon’s “’97 shareholder letter” (shareholder letter) — Jeff Bezos

- **Content type:** Shareholder letter
- **Author/creator:** Jeff Bezos
- **Link/URL:** Not provided in sources (context: discussed in an X post)
- **Who recommended it:** Patrick O’Shaughnessy, relaying Dan Sundheim (D1 Capital; “manages over \$30B across public and private markets”) ³²³³
- **Key takeaway (as shared):** The post argues that founders who can **write clearly** are “rare,” and claims that “the only signal that mattered

²⁵Balaji Srinivasan on building digital commonwealths (EP.43)

²⁶ post by @garrytan

²⁷ post by @garrytan

²⁸ post by @garrytan

²⁹ post by @garrytan

³⁰ post by @garrytan

³¹ post by @garrytan

³² post by @patrick_oshag

³³ post by @patrick_oshag

early in Amazon was the '97 shareholder letter.”³⁴³⁵

- **Why it matters:** This is another instance of long-form writing being elevated as an early, high-signal artifact when other signals may be noisy.³⁶

Source post: https://x.com/patrick_oshag/status/2027057100979859525³⁷

Sources

1. AI is critical for humanity’s survival: Cisco President on the AI revolution | Jeetu Patel
2. Ben Horowitz On What Makes a Great Founder
3. Infinite Games
4. Balaji Srinivasan on building digital commonwealths (EP.43)
5. post by @garrytan
6. post by @patrick_oshag
7. post by @patrick_oshag

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³⁷ post by @patrick_oshag