

Patrick Collison’s reading warning and a founder’s agent demo

Recommended Reading from Tech Founders

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A high-signal, two-item resource list: Patrick Collison’s link to Ed West’s critique of declining literacy, and Cliff Whitesman’s specific recommendation of Brett Taylor’s Sierra product demonstration.

Strongest recommendation

Doomscrolling ourselves to death [1]

- **Content type / creator:** Article by Ed West. Patrick Collison shared it as “Ed West on the decline of reading.” [1]
- **Key takeaway:** West uses James Marriott’s newly published book *The New Dark Ages* as the frame for a broader argument about literacy’s decline. The piece reports falling reading comprehension and reading for pleasure, then connects television’s bias toward triviality—and the later intensification from smartphones and TikTok—to the erosion of concentrated attention and reasoned public discourse. [2]
- **The useful positive case:** This is not only an anti-screen argument. The review presents reading as an empathy engine: books let readers enter the inner lives of people separated from them by class, sex, or race, weakening rigid social categories. [2]
- **Why it matters:** It is the strongest recommendation because it treats reading as a civic and intellectual capability—not merely a productivity habit—and gives a more consequential reason to protect time for serious learning. The review connects literacy to the quality of public reasoning as well as to empathy. [2]
- **Caveat:** West discloses that he and Marriott have become friends. He calls the book entertaining, informative, and coherent, but the relationship

is a relevant qualification to this favorable review. [2]

A practical video recommendation

Brett Taylor’s Sierra Shopify screen-share

- **Content type / creator:** Presentation/video by Brett Taylor. The interview does not supply a direct URL or formal title; Whitesman tells listeners who have not seen it to search for it. [3]
- **Recommended by:** Cliff Whitesman, founder and CEO of Speechify, during a 20VC conversation. He calls the presentation “extremely impressive.” [3]
- **Key takeaway:** Taylor’s screen-share shows him building a guitar store on Shopify and using Sierra for customer support, sales, and related work. Whitesman describes voice as Sierra’s current wedge but identifies tool calling as the more important underlying capability. [3]
- **Why it matters:** This is a concrete founder-recommended example for readers evaluating agent products: the value is not just conversational fluency, but carrying out work across a customer-facing workflow. [3]

Sources

1. X post by @patricke
2. Doomscrolling ourselves to death
3. How to Build Your Own Data Center & Why Every Startup Should Do It