Tim Ferriss's reading list for getting unstuck, led by Studs Terkel's 'Hard Times'

Recommended Reading from Tech Founders

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Tim Ferriss names a stack of books for building, prioritizing and staying resilient. Packy McCormick points to classic texts on bubbles, Bill Gurley endorses Kai-Fu Lee's Fortune interview, and Balaji recommends a history of colonial communities.

Tim Ferriss: books for building, prioritizing and getting through hard times

Ferriss's latest listener Q&A worked as a reading list.

- ***Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression*** by **Studs Terkel** is what he's reading now. It collects firsthand vignettes, including people who "did better than ever during the worst of times." He counts it as "upside time" because it keeps showing "how good people are at surviving, recovering, and then thriving" [1].
- **Casey Neistat's older videos** are for anyone who wants to stop collecting ideas and start building. Ferriss says Neistat explains well why you should keep shipping on a regular cadence, which builds a bias toward action [1].
- ***The 80/20 Principle*** by **Richard Koch** and ***The Effective Executive*** by **Peter Drucker** are his alternatives to his own *4-Hour Workweek* on defining work and cutting the rest. He calls these "evergreen topics that are going to increase in importance" with AI [1].
- ***The 4-Hour Chef***: he singles out its roughly 80-page section on accelerated learning as the book's most important part, because it builds confidence that you can adapt [1].

- ***Crucial Conversations*** and ***The 15 Commitments of Conscious Leadership*** are his picks on relationships. He says the second "gets to the point quickly and offers you tools" [1].
- ***Awareness*** by **Anthony de Mello** is a book he has "gifted more than a hundred times" and read 15 to 20 times himself [1].

Video

Packy McCormick: the bubble canon

In his Not Boring essay "Of Miracles and Moats," which he writes partly "as an investor" [2], McCormick lists frameworks behind his argument about boom-and-bust cycles. They are Carlota Perez's Technological Surge Cycle, Edward Chancellor's Capital Cycle, and a "whole excellent book" by **Byrne Hobart and Tobias Huber** "in praise of bubbles and their role in ending stagnation" [2]. He also tells readers to read an excerpt from **Bill Gates's** 1995 book *The Road Ahead*, which argued that cheap bandwidth would unlock new uses. His verdict: "He was totally right, and not even right enough" [2]. Book · Excerpt

Bill Gurley: Kai-Fu Lee's Fortune interview

Gurley said he enjoyed Lee's Fortune interview. Hearing how AI is perceived "from inside China from someone that knows a lot about global business" is "super valuable," he said, and "it's ok to disagree or dismiss his POV, but the knowledge is useful no matter what" [3]. Lee says the interview takes on three misconceptions: that Chinese open models can't make money, that China competes as one unified bloc, and that export controls will hold back Chinese AI. It also covers the ideas in his new book, *AI Native* [4]. Video

Jessica Livingston: Tyler Shultz's story

With Elizabeth Holmes back in the news, Livingston said "we should recalibrate" by hearing from the original Theranos whistleblower, Tyler Shultz [5]. Video

Balaji Srinivasan: *Albion's Seed*

In a talk on the open-source network state, Balaji recommended *Albion's Seed*. The transcript renders the title as "Albian Seed," which presumably refers to David Hackett Fischer's book. His reasoning: builders need "political history for building communities in the same way you need to learn monetary history for building currencies." He says the book shows how past communities formed, how they varied and which ones succeeded. If you don't have time for the whole book, he suggests reading **Scott Alexander's** review instead [6]. Video

Shorter picks

- **Sarah Guo** shared "more from Walter" (an apparent reference to Fractile's @goodwin_ml) on "how to build chips that push the frontier forward, rather than just try to second-source the elephant" [7]. She posted it alongside praise for Fractile's plan to stack DRAM directly on top of the processor [8].
- **Jason Lemkin** quoted Guille Florvs's breakdown of Doug Leone's three-question investment filter [9]. He said the "one of the 20" question is "the right forcing function." For seed deals, he suggested asking whether the CEO is among the best 20 you've met in the last 24 months [10]. Breakdown
- **Elon Musk** posted "Try Grok @Bot" and linked to Greg Isenberg's post [11]. Isenberg calls his video walkthrough of a Grok Bot setup "the best setup i've EVER seen." The setup runs Claude Code for engineering and Paper for design [12]. Musk has an obvious stake in Grok. Video

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Sources

1. Q&A with Tim — How to Get Unstuck, Resilience in Hard Times, Tools for Brain Health, and More
2. Of Miracles and Moats
3. X post by @bgurley
4. X post by @kaifulee
5. X post by @jesslivingston
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7. X post by @saranormous
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