

Tom Verilli's Reading List Treats Product and Community as Things You Engineer

Recommended Reading from Tech Founders

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An evidence-backed set of organic recommendations led by Tom Verilli's unusually concrete product-and-community reading list, then widened to aesthetics and an optimistic AI-growth thesis.

Most compelling: a product-and-community reading list

Tom Verilli, chief product officer at Whatnot and former CPO at Twitch, gave the clearest recommendation set in the Lenny's Podcast interview. Asked for the two or three books he recommends most, he chose titles for the breadth of operating experience they contain and for their account of how communities form emotional attachment. [1]

- **The Hard Thing About Hard Things** — *book; author: Ben Horowitz*. Verilli calls it “the best book written about product management,” specifically because it covers the range of things leaders must attempt, endure, and get wrong. [1] **Why it matters:** This is a recommendation for the messy operating reality of product work, rather than another abstract product framework.
- **The Purpose-Driven Church** — *book by Rick Warren*. Verilli calls it the best book anyone had recommended to him. Its subject is how people emotionally invest in a group and how that investment can be deliberately engineered; he says it is worth reading for anyone working on a community product. [1] **Why it matters:** The unusual recommendation translates a religious-organizing guide into a practical lens on retention, belonging, and community design.

Aesthetics as a way to think about progress

Patrick Collison’s post turns a complaint about ugly contemporary objects into a reading program about modernism, cultural continuity, stalled cultural progress, and the relationship between beauty and creation. [2]

- **Writing on “stuck culture”** — *essays; creator: Ted Gioia; creator page*. Collison points to Gioia’s writing on why so many domains stopped advancing straightforwardly after roughly the 1990s, and asks what changed. [2] **Why it matters:** It supplies an explanatory question for cultural and product stagnation instead of treating declining quality as mere nostalgia.
- **Writing on beauty and creation** — *essays; creator: Elaine Scarry*. Collison cites Scarry’s argument that beauty inspires creation, then draws the inverse possibility that ugliness inhibits it. [2] **Why it matters:** It gives the aesthetics discussion a concrete hypothesis about how design quality may affect what people choose to make.
- **Solzhenitsyn’s Nobel Lecture** — *lecture; creator: Solzhenitsyn*. Collison highlights its claim that beauty has a distinctive kind of irrefutability and that “a true work of art carries its verification within itself.” [2] **Why it matters:** The lecture offers a philosophical standard for discussing beauty as more than personal preference.

David Perell supplied a more concrete companion recommendation: he said his post on the decline of detail was “Inspired by” The Cultural Tutor’s thread, *The Danger of Minimalist Design (& the death of detail)*. [3] The thread’s title is explicit, while Perell’s accompanying argument compares a richly detailed red phone booth with a grey one and argues that removing individually minor details can collectively drain life from the built environment—even if the result is cheaper. [4, 5] **Why it matters:** It is a usable design test: evaluate not only whether simplification cuts cost, but also what accumulated detail contributes to perceived quality.

An optimistic AI-growth thesis

Garry Tan offered a strong endorsement of Andrew Ho’s long-form X post, calling it “the best white pill” and pairing it with “Growth is good” and “AI will create unimaginable economic growth.” [6]

- **“AI might be humanity’s last hope”** — *essay-length X post; creator: Andrew Ho*; read the post. Ho’s case is more specific than a general optimism slogan: he names falling birthrates, population aging, redistribution, anti-market sentiment, and rent-seeking as long-term headwinds, then argues that AI could reverse them and restore a positive feedback loop for growth. He says he is willing to bet on stronger capabilities because he does not view AI risk as extinction-level. [7] **Why it matters:** It is a compact statement of the pro-growth case for AI, with explicit premises and a proposed mechanism rather than a bare prediction.

Sources

1. This CPO regrets that product management exists | Tom Verrilli (CPO of Whatnot)
2. X post by @patrickc
3. X post by @david_perell
4. X post by @culturaltutor
5. X post by @david_perell
6. X post by @garrytan
7. X post by @andrewho03