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# What the Smartest People I Know Are Quietly Reading

These aren't bestsellers. They're blueprints.

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Anirban Kar

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The hardest thing about growing up in an Indian middle-class family isn't about the lack of resources or opportunities. It is the gap in basic knowledge that is necessary to survive or even thrive in the modern world.

You can do well with limited opportunities and resources. All you have to do is be more mindful and creative.

But you still need to *know* how to do that.

And who would teach you?

Your parents are stuck with the wisdom of a world when knowing how to operate a typewriter was cool. And the less we talk about our education system, the better.

So, unless you are proactively trying to fill the gap on your own, chances are you will live your life in the default mode.

That's why the most successful and smartest people I have met are avid readers. Those who aren't tend to be overconfident show-offs under crippling debt.

But even among those who read, only a few know what to read. And that makes a difference.

The following are the three relatively less recommended books. These were suggested by the people who helped me reconstruct my career in the past years. And most people have never even heard of them.

. . .

## 1. What It Takes To Be Free

**Author: Darius Foroux**

**Goodreads score: 4.13/5**

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*"You can't please everyone. You can't make everybody like you. This is your life, and you can do what you want."*

— *Darius Foroux, What It Takes To Be Free*

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When you read enough self-help books, you will notice that most of them follow a familiar high-on-energy and low-on-substance format.

Instead of delving deep into their key ideas in a meaningful way, the goal is often to hype the reader up and social engineer them into a returning consumer.

Not this one, though.

Image by Goodreads.

What It Takes To Be Free by Darius Foroux talks about what actual freedom should look like. And guess what? It's not out there.

There's a reason why we spend our entire lifetime chasing money. It's because we think financial independence will grant us the sense of freedom we always wanted.

But how does it end up?

The more we earn, the more our needs grow. And the more we need, the more we hustle. As a result, we end up in the exact rat race that we thought we were quitting.

And that's because true freedom isn't *only* about financial growth. It's *also* about being comfortable in your own skin and having the courage to live the life you want

to live. In Foroux's words:

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*"A free person does things that give him lasting happiness."*

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To do so, one must set goals that cater both to their financial ambitions and personal goals. It's about knowing what you are doing, why you are doing it, and the courage to walk away from everything that doesn't fit.

. . .

## **2. Lean Marketing: More Leads. More Profit. Less Marketing.**

**Author: Allan Dib**

**Goodreads score: 4.35/5**

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*"The reality is you don't get what you deserve; you get what you negotiate."*

— *Allan Dib, Lean Marketing: More Leads. More Profit. Less Marketing.*

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I guess you have noticed it by now. Marketing has a bad reputation.

It's because people don't like being marketed to.

It's pushy, heavy-handed, and desperate. It's like when you get stuck with a bad date and the other person refuses to accept the simple fact that you are not that interested.

But here's a catch. Whenever people think of marketing, they think of bad marketing. The good ones don't feel like marketing.

Because they get the basics right. That's where this book can help you out.

Image by Goodreads.

But marketing is for businesses. Right? What if you are not an entrepreneur and never want to be one? Why should you read this book?

No. Marketing is not just for businesses.

No matter who you are or what you do, you serve a market. Be it on your own or on behalf of your employer.

So you will need some clarity on how to sell your value to the right market for the best possible outcome in the least amount of time.

This book helps you do just that by freeing you from the activities that haven't been serving you anymore.

And how does it do that? Simple. It helps you identify the right value proposition for the right target.

An extremely valuable book for those who want to get things done instead of finding a temporary high from an action-faking loop.

### 3. The Great Mental Models: General Thinking Concepts

**Author: Shane Parrish , Rhiannon Beaubien**

**Goodreads Score: 4.08/5**

*“You can’t improve if you don’t know what you’re doing wrong.”*

— *Shane Parrish, The Great Mental Models: General Thinking Concepts*

Shane Parrish is a former intelligence analyst and the mind behind Farnam Street. In this book, he makes life a little easier for people who aren’t that good at the whole business of being a good problem solver.

Image by Goodreads.

He has a better idea. Why be a problem solver when you can prevent a problem from happening in the first place?

But how do you do that? It’s not that hard if you think about it.

Next time, whenever you are given a task, don't think "How do I get it right?"  
Instead, ask yourself, "How many different ways can I mess it up?"

Then, make sure you *don't* do those things.

How does it work? When you are aware of the ways things can go wrong, you have significantly less blind spot compared to when you only think of the ways it can work. As Parrish puts it:

*"In life and business, the person with the fewest blind spots wins."*

. . .

If you understand this, you might already be on the right track.

Whoever you are, wherever you are, and whatever you are doing. It's not only about the fewer big decisions you take in your life.

Instead, it's more about all the micro-decisions you make every day without even knowing it. Like what to eat, when to sleep, and where to spend your money and time on.

And no, you can't be actively mindful of all those decisions.

That's why you need to build your mental model in a way that even when you are not fully conscious of your decisions, your mind still picks the best possible option instead of the easiest one.

And these books can help you do that.

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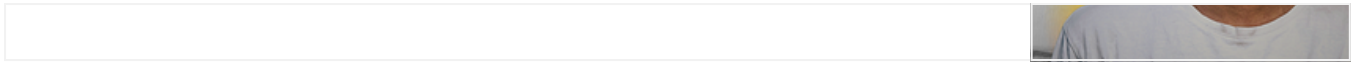
Here's what you all have been asking for in the comments.

### **What the Dumbest People I Know Are Loudly Reading**

Self-help that mostly helps the author's bank account.

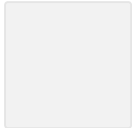
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How does the "Great Mental Models" series differ from "Clear Thinking"?



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JMcM-B2023

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Anibar, nice list here. I give my students Shane Parish's entire set. Well worth the expense, reasonable price, and am considering using it for an entire course in reasonable thinking.



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