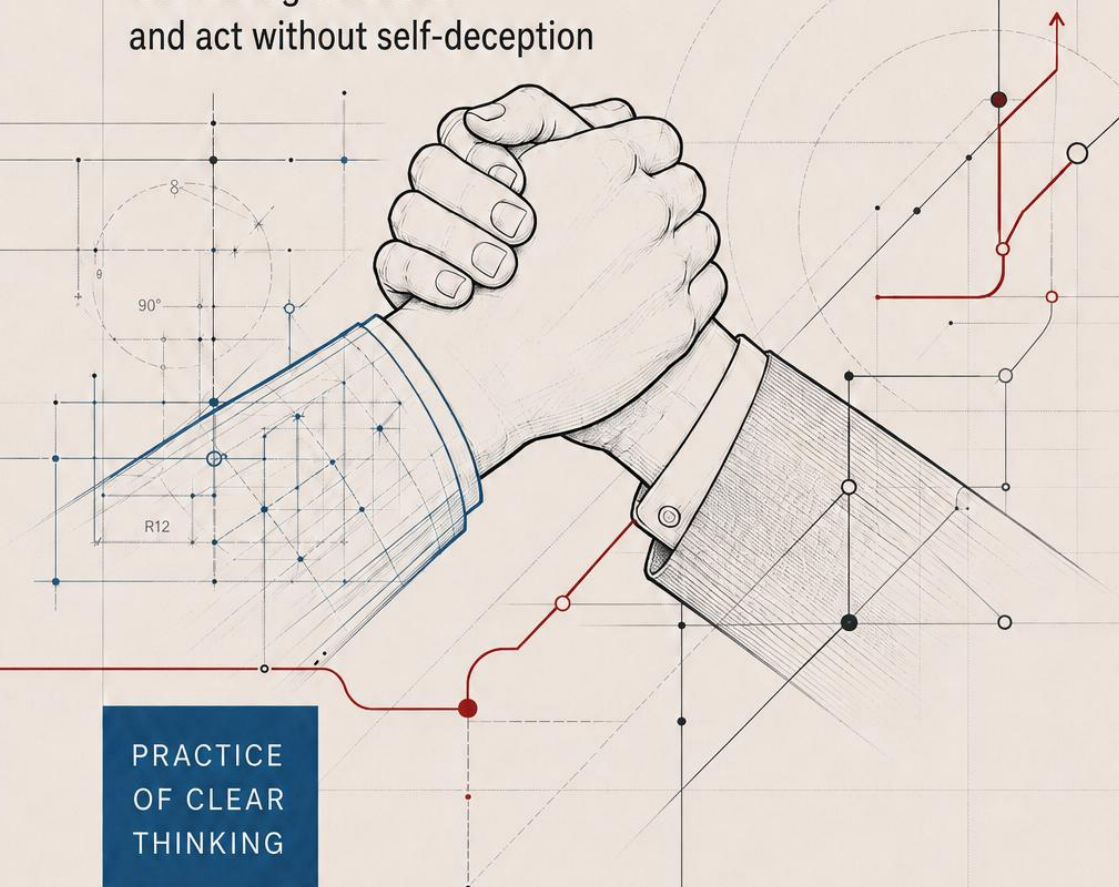


Anton Minin Baranovskii

THIRST FOR REALITY

How to see the task,
find strong solutions
and act without self-deception



PRACTICE
OF CLEAR
THINKING

Thirst for Reality

How to see the task, find strong solutions,
and act without self-deception

Anton Minin Baranovskii

**Thirst for Reality: How to See the Task, Find Strong Solutions,
and Act Without Self-Deception**

Electronic edition, 2026.

Editor: Alexey Naumenko

Contact the author: hi@antonmb.com

This book is a guide to the architecture of solutions without self-deception. It brings together tools of systems analysis and cognitive psychology, helping product builders and technology entrepreneurs find leverage points where others see a dead end.

No glossy success stories. No filler. Only rigorous logic and practical tools for working with the structure of processes, personal energy, and the development of complex systems.

© Anton Minin Baranovskii, 2026

Cover design © Anton Minin Baranovskii, 2026

To my brother and best friend, Ivan.

You are always close, no matter how much distance lies between us.

Thank you for your unconditional support, your precise advice, and the right words at the moments when they mattered most. This book is the result of a path I would not have walked without you.

With love from sunny Argentina.

Acknowledgments

Alexey Naumenko has helped me in the work on this book through his critical feedback, guidance, and careful review. I am deeply grateful to him for his honest comments, precise questions, and support, all of which have helped make this book stronger, more honest, and clearer.



Contents

- **Preface.** Who This Book Is For and Why It Exists
- **Introduction.** You Are Fighting the Wrong Task
- **Chapter 1.** The Fight Is Not with Reality, but with the Fog in Your Head
- **Chapter 2.** The Linguistic Trap: How to Lock Yourself Inside the Wrong Task
- **Chapter 3.** A False Compromise Is a Defeat People Agree To
- **Chapter 4.** Stop Adding. Ask How to Do Without It
- **Chapter 5.** The Resources Are Already There. They Are Just Not Where People Usually Look
- **Chapter 6.** Inventive Principles Work Not with Hardware, but with the Structure of a Solution
- **Chapter 7.** Life Has No Single Right Answer
- **Chapter 8.** A Local Victory Can Kill the System
- **Chapter 9.** The Brain Feeds You Lies, and They Feel Like the Truth
- **Chapter 10.** Conflict Is a Poorly Formulated Task
- **Chapter 11.** Nobody Buys a Product. They Buy Progress
- **Chapter 12.** As Long as an Idea Is in Your Head, It Is Not a Solution but a Hypothesis
- **Finale.** The Cycle of a Strong Solution
- Chapter Summaries
- Sources and Methodological Foundation

Preface. Who This Book Is For and Why It Exists

The business-book market is flooded with books that promise to make you successful, rich, and happy in three simple steps. They offer positive thinking, motivational slogans, and glossy success stories about companies from Silicon Valley.

This book is built in a fundamentally different way. It was born out of a brutal shortage of time, mistakes in real technology products, and the desire to cut away everything unnecessary in order to reach the core.

What This Book Will NOT Give You

Before you turn the page, let us make one agreement about what this book does not promise you:

- There are no magic pills here. If you are looking for a ready-made instruction manual on how to build a business in two weeks without risks or crises, close this book. Living systems do not work that way.
- There is no theoretical filler here. I removed 90% of the academic weight, hundreds of psychological experiments, and dry terminology. Every page here serves one purpose: to give you a sharp, practical tool.
- There are no stories of perfect success here. You will not find stories about how the author never made mistakes and

moved from triumph to triumph. On the contrary, the best lessons in this book are built on the deconstruction of real dead ends, pauses in projects, and traps of the mind.

Why Was This Book Written?

The main purpose of this book is to give you back clarity in your perception of reality.

In business, product management, and personal life, we fight every day not with real problems, but with the illusions created by our own brain. We treat symptoms instead of causes, build interface workarounds into products, burn energy on mental movies, and panic in the face of contradictions.

This book is an engineering tool for your thinking. It brings together systems analysis and psychology to help you:

1. Stop putting out fires and start designing the architecture of processes.
2. Surgically separate cold facts from emotional conclusions and verdicts.
3. Find leverage points where a small, precise effort changes the behavior of the whole system.
4. Resolve internal and product conflicts without half-measure compromises that lead nowhere.

How to Read This Book

This book is built on the principle of minimalism. Each chapter is a complete circuit made of three elements: a breakdown of self-deception, a systems tool, and a practice.

Do not try to swallow this book in one evening. Read one chapter at a time. Read it, close the book, open a notebook, and do the practice for your current project — the one that is stuck right now. Test theory against the market and against action immediately, without stepping away from the text.

If you are ready to remove artificial filters from your thinking, stop administering someone else's chaos, and start seeing the structure of reality as it is, let us begin.

Introduction. You Are Fighting the Wrong Task

The most unpleasant thing about a wrong task is that it rarely looks wrong. Usually, it is the opposite. It has logic, facts, energy, sometimes even discipline. Everything seems to be assembled correctly: a person thinks, acts, tries, fixes, tries again. From the outside, it looks like work on a problem.

And then a strange feeling appears: there is more effort, but less clarity.

Plenty of action. Endless conversations. Countless attempts. But inside, a suspicion slowly grows that the issue is not speed, not character, and not the amount of effort invested. Perhaps the task itself was defined incorrectly from the very beginning. And that is an unpleasant thought.

Laziness is easier to deal with: you can pull yourself together, set a deadline, add discipline, or ask for help. An execution error is easier too: find the failure, redo it, clarify, fix it. But what do you do with a situation where you honestly invested yourself, made decisions, endured, explained, built plans, and then suddenly saw that all this time you had been solving the wrong task, even though you were sure you had hit the very core?

This is where the real work begins.

It rarely looks inspiring. More often, the opposite. There is a moment when you have to stop and admit: the problem is not where it seemed obvious.

- The business is not growing, and the first thought is simple: we need advertising.
- The team is stuck, so we need tighter control.
- Customers are not buying, so we urgently need to rewrite the landing page, lower the price, or add features.
- The conversation is not working, so we need to explain it again, in more detail and more convincingly.
- There is anxiety inside, so we urgently need to understand what is wrong with me.

Each of these thoughts may contain a part of the truth. That is exactly why they are dangerous. A weak thought rarely arrives with a sign saying, “I am weak.” It arrives as relief. Finally, it is clear what to do. Finally, there is a reason, an action, a plan. You can stop suffering from uncertainty and start fixing things. But the first clarity is often not clarity at all. It is a way to reduce internal tension faster.

For a long time, I thought good thinking began with an answer. You see a problem, gather yourself quickly, make a decision, and act. There is a beautiful image of strength in this: composure, speed, confidence, the ability not to freeze.

Later, something else became visible. An answer is valuable only after the task has been defined precisely. Before that, speed can be dangerous. Fast action inside the wrong frame does not save you. It simply fixes the mistake with greater confidence.

A problem and a task are not the same thing.

A problem is more like tension in reality. Something hurts, stalls, repeats, costs more than it should, breaks plans, drains energy, or prevents you from getting the result you need. A problem shows the gap between what is and what should be.

A task appears later. It is already the work of thinking: what exactly needs to change, in what system, under what constraints, with what result, at what cost, and through what resources.

A problem may be vague. A task must be workable.

And this is where the substitution usually happens. A person takes vague tension and treats it as if it were already a precise task. A symptom is called a cause. The first reaction is mistaken for analysis. A convenient explanation begins to look like a fact.

From that moment on, effort becomes questionable. You can add strength, money, control, arguments, and time. But if the original task was defined incorrectly, all of this works like an engine in a car driving in the wrong direction. Fuel is being burned, there is noise, there is movement. The problem is that no one honestly checked the direction.

The first version of a problem is almost always incomplete. The brain saves energy and grabs the nearest explanation, especially if it is familiar, emotionally bright, or protects self-esteem.

- “People do not need this.”
- “I have no discipline.”
- “The team is weak.”
- “Customers do not understand anything.”

- “The market is dead.”
- “I ruined everything.”
- “I just need to try harder.”

These phrases are not always false. That is their strength, and there may be a piece of truth in them. But a piece of truth becomes dangerous when it starts pretending to be the whole truth. It creates the feeling of clarity where there is still fog.

A problem often lives deeper than it seems at first. You can see the pain, but not the structure of the pain. You can see the smoke, but not the place where the fire began. You can see a falling metric, an irritated customer, a missed deadline, a conflict, fatigue, anxiety. All of this is real, and none of it should be treated as nonsense. But a symptom is still not a task. It is only a signal, not a cause.

The symptom is louder than the cause. It presses, irritates, frightens, and demands immediate action. So the natural movement is almost always toward the place that hurts the most. You want to remove the tension, regain control, and stop feeling uncertainty.

But strong thinking begins where a pause appears between pain and action. Not an endless pause. Not clever inaction. Not analysis for the sake of analysis. Just a short stop in which one honest question appears: am I solving the right task right now?

This question can ruin a beautiful plan. It can take away a pleasant sense of certainty. It can show that weeks, months, or years have already been spent fighting a convenient version of the problem. The question is unpleasant because it does not respect the effort

already invested. It does not care how much has already been done. It looks at only one thing: is there contact with reality?

That is its cruelty. And that is also its usefulness.

Reality does not reward effort by itself. It responds to precision. You can be hardworking, intelligent, honest, talented, and still lose if you keep solving the wrong task again and again.

That sounds harsh, but there is freedom in that harshness. If the result depends not only on force, then you can look for the point of leverage. You can stop endlessly pressing on yourself and start examining the structure of the task. You can replace self-blame with investigation. Stop confusing pain with diagnosis. See where the real work is.

A strong solution differs from a weak one not by beauty or volume.

A weak solution often presses on the symptom. It adds weight: more manual work, more control, more costs, more explanations, more tension.

A strong solution changes the structure of the task. It looks for the place where a small, precise change produces a large effect. Sometimes such a solution looks almost boring: remove an unnecessary step, change a formulation, find a hidden resource, or separate conflicting requirements. Test a hypothesis with a small action. Move the error to a place where it becomes cheap. Notice that the problem is not in the person, but in the rules of the system. It is not heroic. But it works.

The film *Cube* offers a precise image for this kind of thinking. People find themselves inside a system that does not become

clearer through panic, force, or mutual accusations. The way out appears not where there is more pressure, but where the structure becomes more visible: connections, constraints, the order of transitions, the rules of the system itself.

Ordinary life is softer, but the principle is similar. When the structure of the task is not understood, energy becomes dangerous. It creates the feeling of struggle, but does not necessarily bring you closer to the exit.

In management, Eliyahu Goldratt's Theory of Constraints stands close to this idea. In *The Goal* and *Critical Chain*, he shows a deeply inconvenient thing for practice: a system rarely improves through equal pressure on all its parts. Often, the main constraint is located in one specific place, while effort is spent where activity is more visible, more familiar, or psychologically more convenient.

This book will not be a retelling of Goldratt, TRIZ, systems thinking, CBT, NVC, JTBD, or Lean Startup. It will be a practical route through them.

At the core lies TRIZ as the engineering nucleus of strong thinking: contradictions, resources, the Ideal Final Result, and the search for a solution inside the system itself. The other approaches are needed as layers around this core: to see more clearly, formulate more precisely, take people into account, understand the real task, and test ideas against reality.

The essence of the approach is simple: first see the task, and only then look for a solution. This order cannot be changed without consequences.

We will move from simple to complex. First, we will look at how a person confuses an event with their inner version of the event. Then we will see how words narrow the field of possible solutions in advance.

After that, we will examine contradictions, resources, and the Ideal Final Result. We will look at how hidden connections, cognitive distortions, and communication work, so that in the end we can reach the real task of a person and test it against reality.

The main work is about how a person sees a task, where they lie to themselves, what price they fail to notice, and how they test a solution against reality. A tool is needed only where it helps do this work with your hands.

In essence, this is a route toward sobriety. Because fog is too expensive. It takes years, money, energy, relationships, projects, and self-respect. A person can honestly try, but if the task is defined incorrectly, effort begins to work against them. It reinforces the wrong route, deepens the familiar mistake, and makes retreat more painful.

That is why the first victory in this book is not to find a beautiful solution or learn a new framework. The first victory is to stop defending the first version of the problem just because it appeared first.

At the end of the book, there will be short chapter summaries: to quickly refresh the map of the book, recall the main move of each chapter, and return to the right place when needed.

Practice

Take one real problem. Not a training problem, not a safe one, not an abstract one, but one that truly exists right now: in a project, work, relationships, money, health, communication, or your own head.

Formulate it in three different versions:

- The first version: how the problem sounds immediately, without censorship or decoration.
- The second version: what in it can be checked through observation, numbers, actions, deadlines, messages, or events.
- The third version: what was added on top of that — fears, guesses, other people's motives, forecasts, generalizations, old explanations, familiar verdicts about yourself or the world.

For example, the first version may sound like this: "Nobody needs my project." A more verifiable version is colder: "In fourteen days, there were twelve registrations and zero payments." The third version may vary: "the market is not ready," "I was wrong about the idea," "people do not see the value," "I need to drop everything."

Some of these explanations may turn out to be true. But first they must be seen as explanations. As long as they pretend to be reality, they control a person from the dark.

The point of the exercise is to create the first crack in the certainty that the first version of the problem is already the truth.

The exercises in this book will not promise instant transformation. Their task is different: each time, they return thinking to facts, the system, people, the price of the solution, and verification.

This is where a thirst for reality begins. Not with a clever method. Not with a beautiful scheme. Not with the promise that everything will now become easy.

It begins with a simple and unpleasant admission: perhaps right now I am fighting not with reality, but with the way I named it. And if the name is wrong, the solution will also miss.

Next, we will go deeper and examine the place where fog appears before the task itself: between event, thought, reaction, and action.