


Dare to be a Nonconformist



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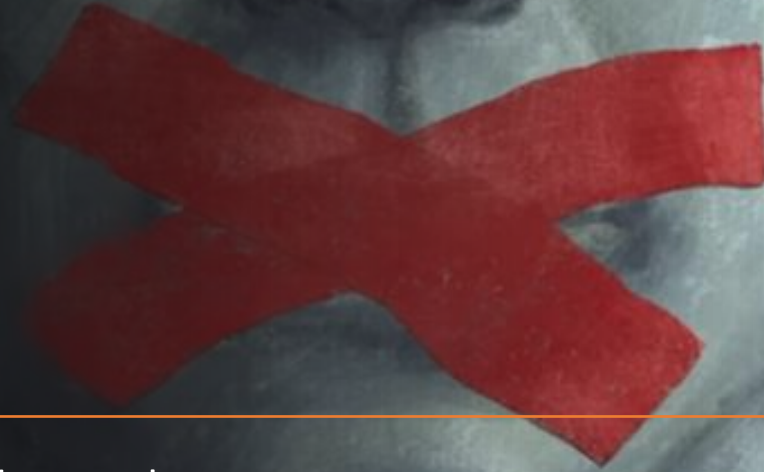
Why are People so Obedient? - Compliance and Tyranny

One of my favorite YouTube channels, Academy of Ideas, presents this outstanding video on the perils of compliance and offers inspiration to dare to be a nonconformist. Most of the content of this PowerPoint is taken from this presentation. Please click the link below to watch this inspirational video.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URdXC6UtfVg&ab_channel=AcademyofIdeas

Many of us fear expressing our political beliefs

Todd Rose references a study conducted in July of 2020 which revealed that nearly two-thirds of Americans are not comfortable voicing their political opinions in public. But to make matters worse, when others see us conforming in public, they assume that we agree with what we are conforming to, and this heightens their inclination to conform and opens the door for collective illusions to form and spread throughout society.



Who is Todd Rose?

Drawing on cutting-edge neuroscience, behavioral economic, and social psychology research, acclaimed author, former Harvard professor, and think tank founder Todd Rose reveals how so much of our thinking about each other is informed by false assumptions that drive bad decisions that make us dangerously mistrustful as a society and hopelessly unhappy as individuals.

Todd Rose believes that as human beings we continually act against our own best interests out of our brains' misunderstanding of what we think *others* believe. A complicated set of illusions driven by conformity bias distorts how we see the world around us. From toilet paper shortages to kidneys that get thrown away rather than used for desperately needed organ transplants, from racial segregation to the perceived "electability" of women for political office, from bottled water to "cancel culture," we routinely copy others, lie about what we believe, cling to tribes, and silence others.



Collective illusions are social lies. They occur in situations where a majority of individuals in a group privately reject a particular opinion, but they go along with it because they (incorrectly) assume that most other people accept it. The result is a pernicious, self-fulfilling prophecy.

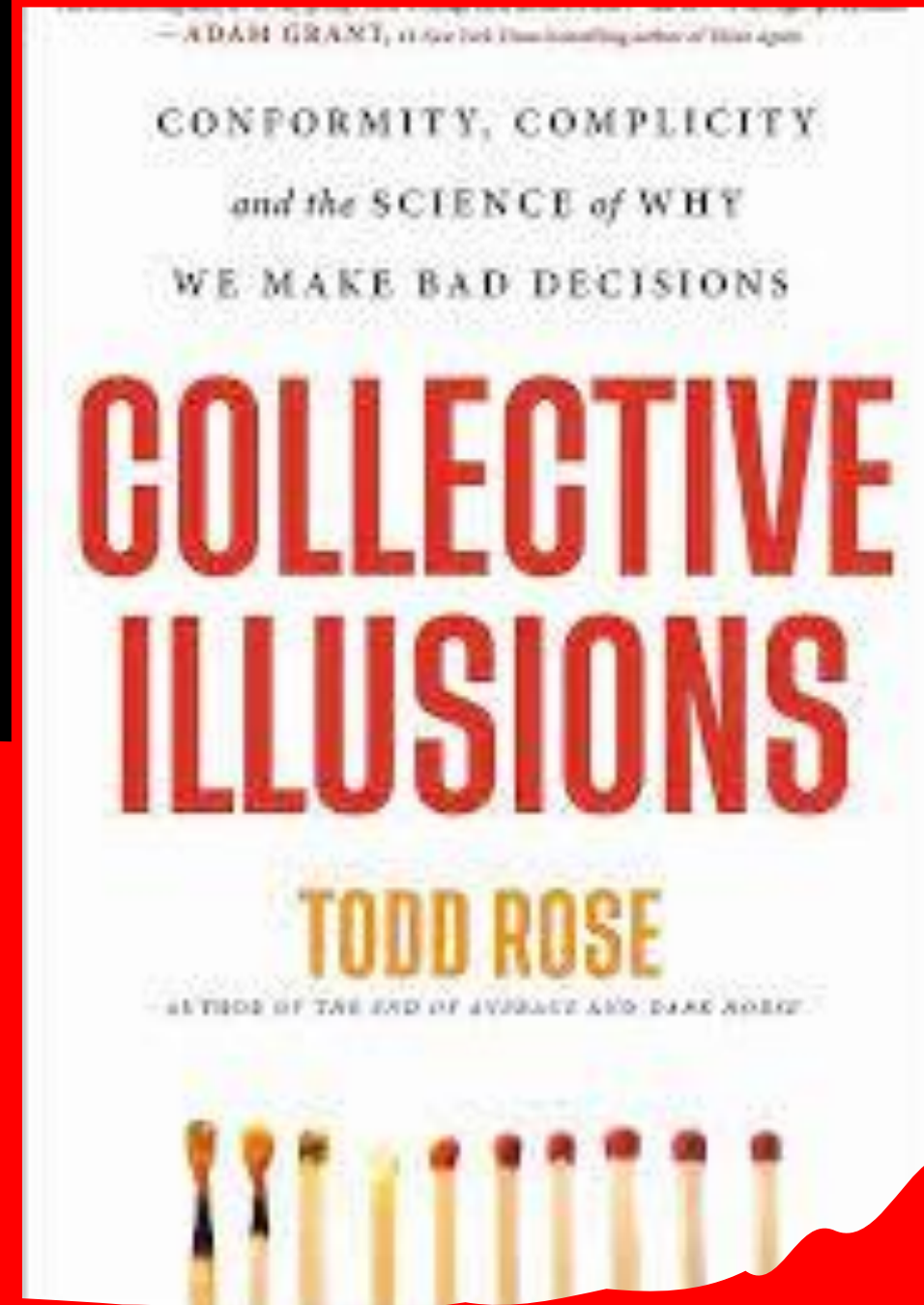
Todd Rose

Collective Illusions

By making blind and ultimately false assumptions about the opinions of those around us and worrying that we are in the minority, we become more likely to perpetuate the very views we and others do not hold. Worse, because the very same people who disagree with the status quo are the ones enforcing it, it becomes all but impossible to dismantle the illusion.

Todd Rose

Collective Illusions





...we care about being in the numerical majority even when we don't necessarily care about the group and even when the group opinion is merely an illusion. Acting on instinct, in social situations our brains don't actually bother to make the distinction between appearance and reality.

Todd Rose

Collective Illusions

We so want to fit in and are willing to sell our intellect, if not our souls.



In the totalitarian system everyone in his or her own way is both a victim and a supporter of the system.

Václav Havel

The Power of the Powerless

In the words of Václav Havel who was a Czech statesman, author, poet, playwright and former dissident.



ON TYRANNY

TWENTY LESSONS

FROM THE

TWENTIETH CENTURY

TIMOTHY SNYDER

Timothy Snyder admonishes us:

Timothy Snyder has done a service for anyone who cares about the future of democracy.

Best known for *Bloodlands*, on Hitler and Stalin's mass murders, and *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning*, *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Century of the Twentieth Century* distills a historian's wisdom about resisting tyranny.

Snyder's first lesson is "Do Not Obey in Advance". On the rise of the Nazis and the communists in Czechoslovakia in 1946, he notes:

Because enough people in both cases voluntarily extended their services to the new leaders, Nazis and communists alike realized that they could move quickly toward full regime change. The first heedless acts of conformity could not then be reversed (18).

Tyrants need willing functionaries to carry out their agenda. What's more worrisome is that functionaries do not just follow orders as is sometimes suggested: instead, they have actively promoted the tyrant's agenda. By doing what they anticipate the tyrant wants, they reveal to the regime just how far it can go.

More from Snyder:



Not obeying in advance is related to Lesson Four: Take Responsibility for the Face of the World. Snyder writes:

In Austria in 1938, people who had not previously been Nazis began to wear swastika pins. What might seem like a gesture of pride can be a source of exclusion. In the Europe of the 1930s and '40s, some people chose to wear swastikas, and then others had to wear yellow stars (35).

To illustrate, Snyder turns to Václav Havel:

When the dissident thinker Václav Havel wrote “The Power of the Powerless” three decades later, in 1978, he was explaining the continuity of an oppressive regime in whose goals and ideology few people still believed. He offered a parable of a greengrocer who places a sign reading “Workers of the world, unite!” in his shop window.

It is not that the man actually endorses the content of this quotation from *The Communist Manifesto*. He places the sign in his window so that he can withdraw into daily life without trouble from the authorities. When everyone else follows the same logic, the public sphere is covered with signs of loyalty, and resistance becomes unthinkable.

The Parable of the Greengrocer

In 1978, when Václav Havel wrote “The Power of the Powerless,” the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia was closely monitoring the activity of this “infamous” writer. One of his scripts, “Audience” (1975), was circulating in samizdat, and the manifesto of Charter 77, an informal civic initiative, was considered illegal.

“The Power of the Powerless,” meant to be integrated in a Polish-Czechoslovak volume of essays about freedom and power, had an important impact on the demoralized opponents of the regimes in the region. It circulated in samizdat and fueled a growing feeling that the dissident activities mattered, that the apparatus was afraid. “This essay reached us (...) at a point when we felt we were at the end of the road. (...) Not seeing any immediate and tangible results, we began to doubt the purposefulness of what we were doing. Shouldn’t we be coming up with other methods, other ways? (...) Then came the essay by Havel. Reading it gave us the theoretical underpinnings for our activity. It maintained our spirits,” remembers Zbigniew Bujak, a Solidarity activist in Poland.

A few months after he wrote this essay, Havel was arrested. Eleven years later, he became the President of Czechoslovakia (and later to the Czech Republic, one of its successors).





The greengrocer hangs his sign not because he receives an order, but because he sees that others do likewise. Others, in turn, follow his example. The system is totalitarian not because some individual has total power, but because power is shared in conditions of total irresponsibility.

Johnathan Snyder

Introduction to The Power of the Powerless



The greengrocer blindly hung out the sign to conform.

...without the greengrocer's slogan the office worker's slogan could not exist, and vice versa...by exhibiting their slogans, each compels the other to accept the rules of the game and to confirm thereby the power that requires the slogans in the first place. Quite simply, each helps the other to be obedient.

Václav Havel

The Power of the Powerless

The greengrocer decided he was done with **blind compliance** and took down the state-mandated sign.



The moment the greengrocer stopped cooperating, he sent a signal to everyone else that they could do likewise.

Todd Rose

Collective Illusions



...surprisingly, with amazing speed, the greengrocer began to gain support for the simple reason that everyone else in the city felt exactly the same way he did. Tired of living under oppression, the tailor and the baker and the office worker followed his lead.

Todd Rose

Collective Illusions

The greengrocer's courage to not conform to a senseless and oppressive state mandate freed others to do the same.



By breaking the rules of the game [of tyranny], the greengrocer disrupted the game...He exposed it as a mere game...He said that the emperor is naked. And because the emperor is in fact naked, something extremely dangerous happened: by his action, the greengrocer...enabled everyone to peer behind the curtain.

Václav Havel


The Power of the Powerless

We must break the rules of the tyrannical and evil game of forced oppression to ideologies that are not based on the good and truth.

Havel, through the parable of the greengrocer, inspires us to reject the lie and live within the truth.



He showed everyone that it is possible to live within the truth.



When challenged to state the truth when we are not confident enough to share our feelings directly due to fearing reprisal, Todd Rose suggests that we can take a softer approach and say things like:

For example, you can say something like, “I haven’t made up my mind yet” or “On the one hand, I can see the value of x, but on the other…” You can also suggest other options by saying things like “I have a friend who…” or “I read somewhere that…”

Todd Rose

Collective Illusions

Doing this gives you plausible deniability while retaining your sense of control. It also offers an escape hatch for others who have been afraid to speak up. Often all it takes is a single spark of ambivalence or mixed opinion. Once you crack open the door, others can gain the courage to follow.

Remember that
totalitarianism is cloaked
in many disguises!



In the totalitarian system everyone in
his or her own way is both a victim
and a supporter of the system.