

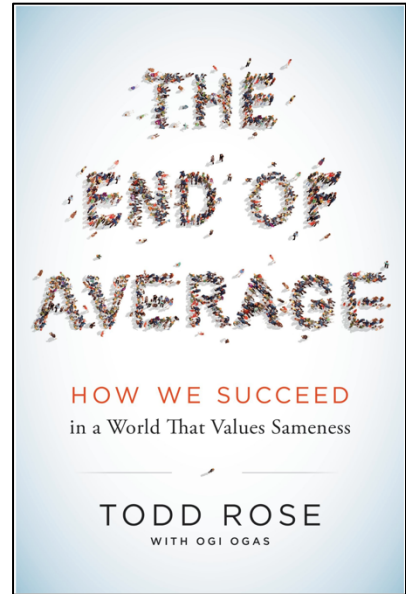
Citation:

Rose, T.(2016). *The End of Average: How We Succeed in a World That Values Sameness*: HarperCollins

Abstract: (from the inside cover)

Are you above average? Is your child an A (or a C) student? Is your employee an introvert or an extrovert?

Every day we are measured against the yardstick of averages, judged according to how closely we resemble it or how far we deviate from it. The assumption that metrics comparing us to an average—like development milestones, GPA's, personality assessments, standardized test results, and performance review ratings—reveal something meaningful about our potential is so ingrained in our consciousness that we rarely question it. That assumption, says Harvard's Todd Rose, is spectacularly—and scientifically—wrong.



In *The End of Average*, Rose shows that *no one is average*. Not you. Not your kids. Not your employees or students. This isn't hollow sloganeering—it's a mathematical fact with enormous practical consequences. But while we know people learn and develop in distinctive ways, these unique patterns of behaviors are lost in our schools and businesses which have been designed around the mythical “average person”. For more than a century, this average-size-fits-all model has ignored our individuality and failed at recognizing talent. It's time to change that.

Weaving science, history, and his experiences as a high school dropout, Rose brings to life the untold story of how we came to embrace the scientifically flawed idea that averages can be used to understand individuals and offers a powerful alternative: the three principles of individuality. The *jaggedness principle* (talent is never one-dimensional), the *context principle* (traits are a myth), and the *pathways principle* (we all walk the road less traveled) help us understand our true uniqueness, and that others, and how to take full advantage of individuality to gain an edge in life.

This powerful book will forever change how you see averages and talent.

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From the Publisher (



A Conversation with Todd Rose, Author of The End of Average

Q: In your introduction to *The End of Average*, you say that the hardest part of learning something new is not embracing new ideas but letting go of old ones, and that the goal of this book is to liberate readers, once and for all, from the tyranny of the average. What is it exactly that you think we need to be freed from, and why is it so important to you that you get this message out?

Todd Rose: There are certain ideas, like this idea of the average person, that are so deeply ingrained in our society—everything from how we think about newborns and whether they're healthy, to the way we structure schools and workplaces, to the way we practice medicine, and so on—that we don't even question some basic assumptions. We see the challenges that are facing our society and we know that we want things like personalized medicine and personalized education and better workplace environments, but we've not really realized that at the root of those problems is a basic idea of how we see ourselves as people. My hope is to use this book to start a conversation that surfaces this basic assumption we've made about human potential, and help people to see that it's actually the thing that's holding us back.

Q: Tell us a little about the beginning of *The End of Average*, where you talk about how the average became the normal way to measure individuals, and the stereotypes that were validated with the "imprints of science," as you say.

Todd Rose: This whole idea of an average person happened in the mid-nineties, when countries were trying to figure out how to govern rapidly growing populations. There was no science of society, no social science. And it was a French astronomer named Adolphe Quetelet who came up with the idea. He basically asked himself, "If we were all astronomers and we were trying to measure the speed of Saturn, we would all get slightly different measurements, but which one is right?" It turns out, more or less, if you average together all the speeds, the average is usually the best estimate. In astronomy, that thinking turns out to be true most of the time. So by Quetelet's logic, he figured if the average is right in astronomy, we could stop worrying about the muddle of individual people and just average them out to make an average man. He actually coined the term "the average man". He believed this thinking to be so true that any deviation from average was a monstrosity. So this became the foundation for bureaucracies, and then it slowly made its way into the rest of social science, and this thinking continues unabated today—in our education systems with GPAs and test scores, in our companies with performance reviews and hiring processes, in our healthcare system with the way we treat patients, and on and on.

Q: Tell us about your three principles for understanding individuals: the Jaggedness Principle, the Context Principle, and the Pathways Principle. They seem to really succinctly capture a very helpful way of thinking about what to do next.

Todd Rose: Basically, if we are going to say that average doesn't work and it's not type or rank that we should be looking at, then how do you understand individuals? This is the science I'm a part of, and we focus on three principles: Jaggedness, Context, and Pathways. We look for patterns about the individuals themselves in those principles. I go into detail about each in the book.

My Take on This Book

I've actually written two book reviews on this book, and published one with a colleague of mine. I am not including either of those book reviews here because over time I've come to simplify my views on what I think Todd Rose was trying to do with this book. I heard it said recently that authors only say a fraction of what they know they could say, but may not want to go too deeply given the goal of their book or the type of audience they are writing to. This makes sense. If you follow Dr. Rose at all, you know that type of detailed science he's involved in....he certainly could have expanded this book to include all of the science of learning and development that backs up his statements....but we'd like give up reading after the first 500 pages...if not sooner.

This book does what it sets out to do. It truly uncovers myths we've been raised in and helps us re-examine long-held beliefs....it's refreshing and liberating. This book adds to a lot of work that's gone before it, such as Sir Ken Robinson's work on creativity, intelligence and so on....you might want to check out Robinson's TED Talk too. Enjoy!