

How Cape Town's YPO 2019 brings meaning to a 'Life of Re' for creative CEOs

 By Leigh Andrews

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With presentations and addresses from the likes of Rwanda's president Paul Kagame, SA president Cyril Ramaphosa and Trevor Noah, YPO hosted the world's largest gathering of CEOs right here in Cape Town on 6 and 7 March 2019, for its Global Leadership Conference and YPO Edge, with the theme, 'Life of Re'. I'll present a few of the key outtakes from select members and speakers over the coming weeks - up first, how the C-Suite in general and media creative specifically can take the theme to heart and make a difference through positive change in society beyond the bottom line.

“ Rwanda: Kagame ([@PaulKagame](#)) in South Africa for Young Presidents' Organisation Summit

[@angekagame @EY_Growth @YPO @YPOEdge @YPOGLC #PresidentsSummit #YPOEDGE #OnlyInYPO— APRECON \(@aprecon\) March 6, 2019](https://t.co/pqETWfCRrl) ”

While the event was closed to YPO members, I popped in to chat to a handful of the local members and international YPO Edge speakers between sessions.

This included the likes of SA's own King James Group CEO James Barty; author and founder of New York-based Stable Genius Productions Manoush Zomorodi; international storyteller Cal Fussman; and former Olympic rower and founder of 50 Eggs production company, Mary Mazzio.

All shared insights into having the event held in Cape Town, as well as how the C-Suite in general and media creatives in particular can bring YPO's vision to life in affecting positive change in society through the theme, life of Re...

“ Resist receive reveal relieve,

Relive relight re: love retrieve

Renounce rejoice refute recite

Re: darkness reignite

[#YPOEDGE pic.twitter.com/qoKciqbl5E— Iemn sissay MBE \(@Iemnsissay\) March 6, 2019](#) ”

James Barty on living a beta life, the impact of the ripple in the pond

I chatted to Capetonian Barty first. On the fact that the YPO Edge event took place in Cape Town this year, he commented that it's effectively assembled the most incredibly powerful body of people who influence. There's also a sense of the ripple in the pond as the leadership represented at YPO, and their collective power to shape things, is pretty impressive.

Barty heard in the morning sessions that YPO's leadership is effectively the third largest global economy behind the US and China - that gives a sense of the decision-making power at stake. In harnessing that, he says the country and business leaders not attending YPO will get a sense of that positive messaging, as YPO's attendees all want to learn more about South Africa and our business environment. He says, "If they can learn just that little bit more about SA than they knew before they came here, that'll be a positive impact story."



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These are people who can positively impact not just in a sense of doing business, but in doing good in lots of different ways, through doing business. Barty acknowledges that the cynics may say business is the purest form of capitalism, but there's no denying that business today is not just about that. It's about an impacting the economy in a powerful way, and that's the difference.

On the theme of 'Life of Re', Barty feels organiser Ravi Naidoo expressed it best:

“ We need to live our lives likes we are permanently reinventing ourselves, and permanently in beta testing. It's no longer an option to settle, to not challenge ourselves to do more as leaders, both for the companies and teams we lead, who look to us for that sense of continual renewal and reinvention. ”

So even if the only outtake for attendees is that sense of wondering what you'll now do differently, that's a big change.



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Ending with advice for non-YPO members, on how the C-Suite in general and media creatives specifically can make a difference through positive change in society beyond the bottom line, Barty said YPO definitely inculcates a sense of leadership amongst members, which has a trickle-down effect. Without turning it into a cliché, he said proper leadership is vitally important in business and society alike, especially in light of all the crises and ills the world is facing, in all sectors.

YPO put it all into leadership context and instills the important values that anyone in any organisation and any part of society can learn from. That's the overall positive message for everyone - better leadership through involvement, and everyone can play a role. Just talking about these messages shared will help amplify and spread the message.

Manoush Zomorodi on the power of industry support beyond networking

On what she's most enjoying about both YPO 2019, Zomorodi shared that the last time she was in Cape Town was 18 years ago, so it's been interesting for her to see how things have changed since then. She commented that it's much busier, with more traffic, but the wine and food are as wonderful as she remembers.

Zomorodi loves that YPO has a relaxed casualness to it, considering members are all from the C-Suite. Her understanding is that it's a support group for leaders, which is an unusual concept. She said she now understands why people travel such

distances to attend it, as there's a real sense of camaraderie and sharing with people who understand what you're up against every day.

While YPO is focused on CEOs at the top level, Zomorodi said there's a definite trickle-down effect, because if CEOs need support, we all need support.

“ We can learn from YPO in that it's a great idea to find similar people in our field, share our stories and the highs and lows, and give each other some coaching – there's a lot to be learned from inter-industry companionship and coaching beyond just networking. ”

Cal Fussman on Re: The letters of our time

Fussman has also been to Cape Town before, and while he had just arrived on our shores when I tackled him with the question, he said there are so many things that make him feel comfortable here and that he wants to know more about. He loved seeing the CTICC filled up for YPO's global event, and he was really taken with how smoothly things had run here. It also struck him, as someone who had met Nelson Mandela 15 years ago, that all that was accomplished since then, in bringing people together. He says, “Man, this is an unbelievably great place to live.”

Fussman adds that only a few places in the world have the energy of Cape Town with its mountains and ocean, and what he calls “such a pleasant blend of people”. He was also impressed when his driver informed him that our current Constitution, in Mandela's thoughtful way, included a massive public participation programme. It's often said that South Africa has the best Constitution in the world, so one of Fussman's missions is to read up on our Constitution.



On this year's YPO theme, Life of Re, and what it means to him, Fussman said,

“ To me, the letters Re are probably two of the most important letters that we've got, going forward. For example, you used to have one type of job, which you would switch nine times in your life. Now, you have to rather reinvent yourself nine times. That's what it means: Being willing to reinvent yourself, almost every day. That's the world right now. Storytelling is another great part of that reinvention. Because if you're open to listen to stories – that's an avenue into disruption. The very act of listening is also disruption because you come into a conversation one way, then hear something that enables you to reinvent yourself, and you're both disrupted yourself and able to disrupt in turn. ”

That aspect of disruption and reinvention is why Fussman calls 'Re' letters of our time.

Mary Mazzio on going beyond CSI lip service

Former Olympian Mazzio had never been to Cape Town before and on first impressions, finds the country amazing – so vibrant and beautiful. To her, this year's theme 'Life of Re' means re-engage, reignite, revisit, rethink and redouble.

Lastly, for anyone not at YPO, on how the C-Suite can make that difference, Mazzio said that any CEOs' reputation is increasingly dependent upon who and what they stand for, whether they realise that or not. Secondly, she points out that as much as 80% of household purchase decisions are made by women, yet very few brands actually speak to the everyday woman.

There's some light in this regard, with Dove now featuring ordinary-looking people.



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Mazzio commends the move away from just "waif-like blonde leggy models that no-one looks like in real life," so again it all comes back to what you stand for as a brand, and what is your social responsibility. We're seeing increased polarisation and nationalistic fervour globally. Why is that? Because so many people are feeling disenfranchised. As a result, we have a greater disparity between the haves and have-nots, which Mazzio calls a cocktail for disaster.



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And yet, so many companies are purely focused on their bottom-line, on their shareholders, and legitimately so, but that often means they're not focused on something important - reinvestment in the community. Most companies have a CSR division, but those programmes have "two nickels for budget", so it's often pure lip service. If CEOs truly undertake certain issues, we will all be better for it.

That's the calibre of discussion taking place at YPO.

Keep an eye out for my in-depth interviews with each interviewee, follow YPO's [YPO Edge](#) on Twitter and watch the [hashtag](#) for insights throughout the global gathering.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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