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### The “Almost Me” Factor

Dinner with YPO (Young President’s Organization) members is like attending a cult’s recruiting event. Everyone is overly excited about the possibility of you becoming one of them, and they each take turns telling the story of how they joined. Rick Rodriguez, a 15 year YPO member, says that your story is an important part of being in YPO. The journey of how you got to be a member is just as important as being one.

YPO is an international organization for presidents and CEOs to learn, work, and grow in the personal and professional world. The organization has over 450 chapters and over 25,000 members. YPO members devote much of their time, and dedicate their success to the organization. Some people met their spouses through it, and just as many blame their divorce on it. The median annual revenue per YPO-run company is \$45 million, making their combined revenue \$6 trillion. Understanding that these company leaders control 8% of the world’s GDP and are approximately equivalent to the world’s third largest economy demonstrates the power of their money.

The connections are practically as influential as their money. If a member is stuck in an airport, has a family with a medical need, has a business deal go south, or wants access to a private event, their needs can be met within one to two hours once a member says “I

know a buddy in YPO who can help out.” The money, the resources, and the networking of these people lets them control or overcome almost anything.

On April 13, 2006, there was a duel chapter event at a small airport, called “YPO Air Force.” This aviation exhibition was like many other YPO experiences because it included a bar, appetizers, and private access to an area where the public is not usually permitted. On the tarmac, privately owned jets, prop planes, and helicopters were elegantly staged for entertainment and potential plane shoppers. The guests walked in and out of each one while balancing their fresh cocktails. It was not a formal occasion, but no one is known to underdress at a YPO event.

The evening included a second part with dinner at a member’s ranch nearby. Most people planned to carpool to the next venue, but one gentleman, whose helicopter was part of the exhibit, offered to shuttle people over to the ranch. As a very experienced pilot, he flew multiple times a week. I will call him Jack, to respect his and his family’s privacy.

Later that April evening Rick Rodriguez would receive a call from his close friend and fellow YPO member. “Rick, it’s Doug. There was a terrible accident.” To this day, Rick cannot remember why he was not at the event.

Not long before Rick received that phone call, Jack and three passengers got into his helicopter, while everyone watched and waited to take the next ride to the ranch. The helicopter tripped a power cable, flipped over and crashed into the ground. The National Transportation Safety Board report read,

One piece of power line wire extended 148 feet from the helicopter... Another piece of power line wire that was wrapped around the main rotor and tail rotor extended outward 18

feet...The cabin area was completely destroyed by a post impact fire that consumed the forward portion of the helicopter.

Many bystanders tried to help, but were held back because of the fire, fuel spill, and power cables scattered on the ground. Of the three passengers, one died on the scene, one died within a few days, and one survived with injuries. The pilot, Jack, was left with severe burns and injuries. Over the next fourteen months, each of Jack's limbs had to be amputated, and he passed away in June 2007.

The YPO members at the event had no choice but to watch their friends suffer and sustain fatal injuries. People with lives full of power and control suddenly had no control at all. They could not call a buddy to fix the situation. The only thing they could do was call 911.

Rick was scheduled to fly with Jack to the coast in his helicopter the week after the accident. Instead, he visited Jack and his family regularly for the next year as he disappeared. Rick still thinks about how he would have been the first person in that helicopter, how he could have been a person without any control. "That was almost me."

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