

Simple Routines Help Hugh Forrest and His Team Plan SXSW's Thousands of Panels in Music, Tech and Film

Never underestimate the power of a quick email reply or a face-to-face meeting.

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How Success Happens is a podcast featuring polar explorers, authors, ultra marathoners, artists and more to better understand what connects dreaming and doing. Host Linda Lacina guides these chats so anyone can understand the traits that underpin achievement and what fuels the decisions to push us forward. Listen below or [click here](#) to read more shownotes.

Each year, thousands descend upon Austin, Texas for SXSW, a celebration of tech, movies, education and politics. They come, in part, for the more than 2,000 panels and presentations packed with thought leaders, actors, authors, astronauts and a range of buzzy personalities. Attendees have Hugh Forrest, the event's chief programming officer, to thank for the lineup.

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Forrest has been with the festival since 1989 and hasn't just watched the festival grow – he's actively helped it scale, learning new ways to help his team plan ahead and keep abreast of the latest trends and buzzy topics.

The SXSW of three decades ago would be “unrecognizable” to attendees now, says Forrest. “It took a long while to get where we are now. We’re still growing in many ways improving, but it wasn’t like we just turned on a switch and it happened.”

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Key to growth was letting profitable parts of the festival, like music, fund newer experiments over the years, such as multimedia. Developing the SXSW panel picker, a crowdsourcing process to get more ideas into the planning pipeline early, has also been essential for helping to scale the programming.

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But simple routines have also played a role. Forrest says that quick emails can do wonders to re-engage a staffer who could easily get lost in the slog of details that surround planning this massive festival. He’s learned what to watch for when a staffer disconnects – and how important it is to the festival’s success that they get brought back into the fold.

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In today’s podcast he’ll talk about how he’s learned to maximize the 10-12 month planning cycle that makes the festival come to life. He’ll also share the routines he puts in place not just to make that event possible, but to keep his team connected and engaged and moving projects forward.

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