

WINTER 2025 **IMPACT**2.0



IN 2025

A
BRIEF
HISTORY
OF (A)
TIME

The IMEX Talking Point for 2025 was **Impact 2.0**: Activating the future.

Having given life to Impact as our Talking Point, and integrated it into our thoughts and actions, we're taking a moment to look at 25 aspects of our lives that were forever changed by 2025.

We love a trend but, more than anything, we love it when a constructive, life-affirming trend transforms into something real and lasting. Into a positive impact that's measurable, concrete and, let's be honest, optimistic about our future and our collective human potential.

Here's our subjective, non-scientific look back at 2025, plus a look ahead at what might be coming and its potentially positive impact on the global events industry and those who work in it (and dare we say love it!).

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1 FOCUSING ON IMPACT

First some usual background. Two years ago, we established a dedicated Impact team to focus on some big things that really matter to us, and to you—our community.

In the coming years, we plan to develop baseline measures that demonstrate return on time, attention and carbon when you travel to an international business event like IMEX.

We've got data, a mandate from our board, the people, the partners and the resources. We're on it.

Expect more on this in 2026.



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2 RETURN ON RELATIONSHIPS

Cvent's 2025 Meetings and Events Trends offered a potential roadmap. They argued Return on Relationships (ROR) is now key to success in the events marketplace. "In an industry built on relationships, the strength of those relationships will be recognized as a marker of success... Events help build trust, leading to greater brand loyalty, better customer retention, and a higher lifetime value for each client. Plus, the more you know your audience, the more you can personalize their experiences, creating stronger emotional connections with your brand."



3



BEING TOGETHER MATTERS

In our spring report, **The Power of Experiences: Redesigning Events for Human Connection**⁽¹⁾, we argued that events are no longer just about economic return, brand-building, bonding or communication; they're essential for repairing our social fabric, stimulating our social health and addressing the silent epidemic of disconnection. As David Allison, CEO of The Valuegraphics Research Company, explained, "No other values are present across every dataset, underscoring a profound truth: being together is essential to all of us, regardless of background, culture or profession. For event professionals, this insight is transformative—it highlights the immense power of designing experiences that foster human connection, bridge divides, and unite people in a world that deeply craves it." We then wondered, within the scope of an events portfolio, should we be looking at event deliverables very differently?

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FRIENDSHIP ROCKS!

Happily, we found that author and speaker Simon Sinek admits to being obsessed with friendship right now,

“There’s an entire industry to help us be better leaders... better parents... an entire industry to help us eat better, exercise better, sleep better, and yet there’s barely anything on how to be a friend. And yet friendship is the ultimate bio hack.”

Remember when **Hilton** ⁽²⁾ coined the phrase “frolleagues” to mean co-workers—but better? How many friends or frolleagues have you made from working in the global events industry? And, not to ignore the long hours, immovable deadlines and stress-filled days events can impose—aren’t our brilliant frolleagues precious, important and worthy of more celebration?

Take this chance to shout out all your frolleagues. #FriendshipRocks!



HAPPINESS IS A SKILL

We explored happiness as a skill in our Power of Experiences report. Dr Sonja Lyubomirsky’s research on happiness reveals that it is often driven by intentional activities rather than external circumstances. In her book *The How of Happiness*, Sonja emphasizes that up to 40% of our happiness is shaped by intentional actions and habits—reinforcing the idea that fostering meaningful connections can significantly enhance well-being.

And who knows better than anyone how to foster meaningful connections? Event planners.

LIVE EVENTS AS MEDICINE AND HEALING

Once we dug deeper into the role of live events in society in 2025, we discovered others asking similar, big questions. Such as, could live events not only be the antidote to social disconnection and mistrust but also a path to healing and transformation?

As Jessica Turek Weickert, VP of Strategy at XDA, stated in her article *The Healing Power of Experiences*: “There’s a medicine that has the power to heal us, transform us, and ultimately give us the resilience to combat loneliness. This medicine is what I like to call: experiences.”

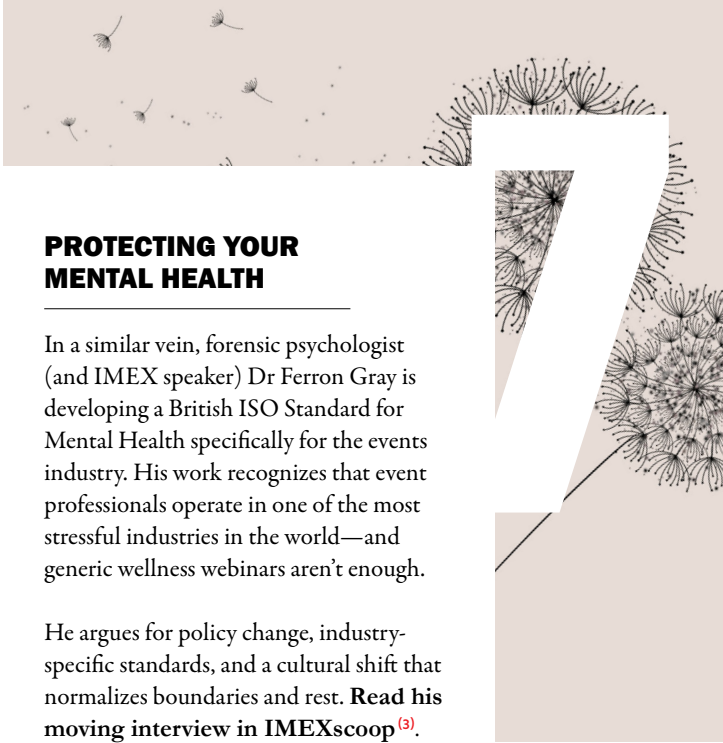
Right on cue, at IMEX America in Las Vegas this year, Olympian Meeting’s Co-Founder David Stevens brought a

multitude of holistic health partners together for a Circadian Cove experience.

The concept? Intentional, science-backed activations timed to participants’ natural circadian rhythm, keeping attendees alert in the morning, focused mid-day and relaxed in the evening.

“Wellness at business events should do more than feel good; it should drive impact and outcomes,” says David. “By partnering with Dr. Jess Garza of Legacy Mindset, we created a lounge that’s grounded in empirical science and built to optimize performance, mood and engagement throughout the day.”

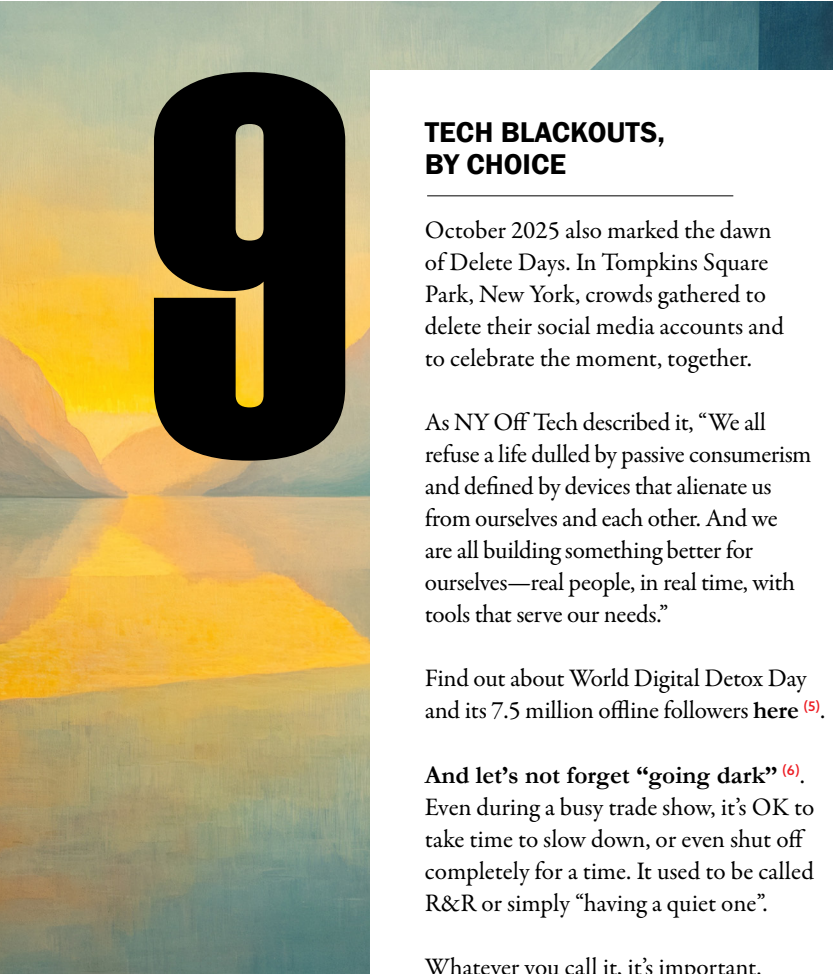
WE SAY: Bring on the healing. Let’s feel better, together.



PROTECTING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

In a similar vein, forensic psychologist (and IMEX speaker) Dr Ferron Gray is developing a British ISO Standard for Mental Health specifically for the events industry. His work recognizes that event professionals operate in one of the most stressful industries in the world—and generic wellness webinars aren't enough.

He argues for policy change, industry-specific standards, and a cultural shift that normalizes boundaries and rest. **Read his moving interview in IMEXscoop⁽³⁾.**



9 TECH BLACKOUTS, BY CHOICE

October 2025 also marked the dawn of Delete Days. In Tompkins Square Park, New York, crowds gathered to delete their social media accounts and to celebrate the moment, together.

As NY Off Tech described it, “We all refuse a life dulled by passive consumerism and defined by devices that alienate us from ourselves and each other. And we are all building something better for ourselves—real people, in real time, with tools that serve our needs.”

Find out about World Digital Detox Day and its 7.5 million offline followers **here⁽⁵⁾**.

And let's not forget “going dark”⁽⁶⁾. Even during a busy trade show, it's OK to take time to slow down, or even shut off completely for a time. It used to be called R&R or simply “having a quiet one”.

Whatever you call it, it's important.



8 SLOWING DOWN—OR SOFA ROTTING ANYONE?

Not everyone connects or communicates the same way—and recognizing that matters.

At IMEX Frankfurt in May, Venezuelan communication coach José Ucar challenged us all to slow down to communicate better.

In *How to Communicate with Impact to Build Better Human Connections*, he introduced behavioral types we rarely discuss: dog-like (approachable, open) versus cat-like (more withdrawn, selective).

José also urged us not only to speak slower, but to think slower—to be more present and listen more effectively. This felt timely, honest and challenging.

We all know it, but often the force and speed of change (not forgetting information-overload) combine to conspire against us.

Alternatively, at IMEX America, the Legends of Live Events session reminded us that 68 million people watch shows like America's Got Talent—yet at our own events, we often struggle to get attendees to look up from their phones and make eye contact.

Oh, yes, and then there's sofa rotting. The linguistic spawn of bed rotting. Hilton's 2026 Trends Report⁽⁴⁾ puts a more glamorous spin on it. “Hushpitality will see travelers looking for destinations and experiences to dial down life's distractions. Seeking calm—even moments of silence—signals a change in why people are traveling, where they're going, and how they'll relax.”

Thanks again to Hello! Destination Management for partnering with us to create a calming and restorative Resilience Room at IMEX America this year.



IT'S (MORE THAN) OK TO DESIGN FOR JOY

One antidote to overload and overwhelm could be an event Passion-O-Meter, as proposed by leading industry writer and commentator, David Adler.⁽⁷⁾

His IMEX America panelists agreed⁽⁸⁾ that the future of events (or the present day for the event pioneers) isn't simply organizing gatherings but creating emotional experiences that generate measurable positive impacts such as excitement and passion. David argued that a design ethos centered on emotional

enrichment shifts the focus from logistics to collective psychological uplift.

His audience also learned that technologies such as Zenus can analyze crowd sentiment and engagement levels in real-time without identifying individuals, providing aggregated emotional data while maintaining privacy.

This means planners can now both orchestrate and measure positive emotions, such as awe.

And we're taking this moment to shout out our talented colleague and Head of Program, Tahira Endean's latest book. She nailed this cultural moment in **Our KPI is Joy**.⁽⁹⁾



FUTURE SPACES

Technology is creating multiple possibilities for the design of IRL (in real life) spaces that merge physical and digital realms while, at the same time, consumers are re-evaluating what they need most from the places they spend time in.

Look around and you'll see that tactility (things you can touch) and inclusivity are being re-established as core principles to guide placemaking.

"Younger generations raised in virtual realms now expect spaces to echo the interactivity and immersion of the online world. Brands must develop retail and hospitality environments into more sensorial, narrative-led experiences that bridge the online and offline worlds physically and aesthetically," says Emily Rhodes, Creative Lead, The Future Laboratory.

For more, see 14—Places and Spaces—and look out for news about the IMEX Policy Forum in the new year.

NEURODIVERGENT DESIGN MATTERS

A huge acknowledgement is due here to recognize our work with Google's Megan Henshall. Megan—we thank you!

In 2023/4 we partnered with Google Xi to bring their **CoLaboratory**⁽¹⁰⁾ experimental workshops, activations and Resilience Room to our shows.

In the process we learned about the **Neu Project**⁽¹¹⁾, initially a grassroots movement at Google and now an experience design and strategy consultancy, helping brands, workplaces and communities unlock human potential by designing environments where all minds can thrive. Billed as a space for innovators, divergent thinkers, designers and creators, experience architects, strategists, businesses, dreamers and doers, the Neu Project reminds us: “Humanity is on the cusp of a revolution. And it’s not what you think. It’s not a revolution of AI. Or the latest thing that’s bling. It’s a revolution of the human mind. This revolution asks: *What if we embraced the full range of our humanity? What if we leaned hard into all strengths and designed spaces in ways that cared for all human needs?*” Thanks to the Neu Project who, together with Google Xi, Storycraft Lab and Hello! Destination Management created our first Resilience Space at IMEX America in 2023.

In 2025 we partnered with the American Psychological Association (APA) and Australian Psychological Society (APS) to launch a new framework for neurodivergent inclusivity in event design. IMEX America was awarded Level III Comprehensive Neuro-divergent Accommodation, the highest level of endorsement (for areas within our control).

Look out for a case study coming soon.

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TREASURING THE ENVIRONMENT

Working with our new sustainability partners, isla, we co-launched a free **Event Carbon Measurement Starter Pack**⁽¹²⁾. It provides clear guidance on why, what and how to measure carbon emissions, simplifying the process for event professionals, plus actionable advice and practical tips for effectively reducing event carbon footprints and making more sustainable events accessible and achievable.”

We’ll continue to use TRACE, isla’s⁽¹³⁾ carbon measurement platform, across our supply chain to measure IMEX Frankfurt 2026’s carbon footprint.

Keeping ourselves accountable for our environmental progress is important to us. With that in mind, we publish our results for each show in a **Sustainability Report**⁽¹⁴⁾.

Want to dig deeper? See our Snapsight summary, takeaways and idea cloud from **Designing for Climate Change**⁽¹⁵⁾ by the Event Design Collective at IMEX America.

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PLACES AND SPACES

Strategic partners to IKEA, Ingka Centres' 2024 Life in Communities Report ⁽¹⁶⁾ provides future focused guidance on global demand for public spaces. It reveals that real-life connections and play are the ultimate joy providers.

Conducted in Europe, China and the US, it found, "People of all ages are looking for new and different ways to unwind, relax and connect with others, to fulfil their emotional needs and cope with everyday challenges."

"Two-thirds of Gen Zs surveyed believe time spent together in person builds trust and enhances the overall quality of the experience. Many of this generation however suffer disproportionately from social anxiety when meeting face to face."

The 2025 IMEX Policy Forum during IMEX Frankfurt further explored place and place leadership.

Professor Greg Clark CBE, has advised over 400 cities globally, captured the need for urgency and transformation: "Business events and place leadership have become more important in the past 18 months. This is a moment of great geopolitical change. Our system of global economic organization is being reset in a way which is more fragmented, less dominated by individual sources of power—and that means more opportunity for more places."

WE SAY: Events are places too. Temporary but visceral. They have their own identity. And we visit them, online or IRL, as we would any other destination. Importantly, they're also places where we spend money and generate economic and other positive impacts. *See 11.*



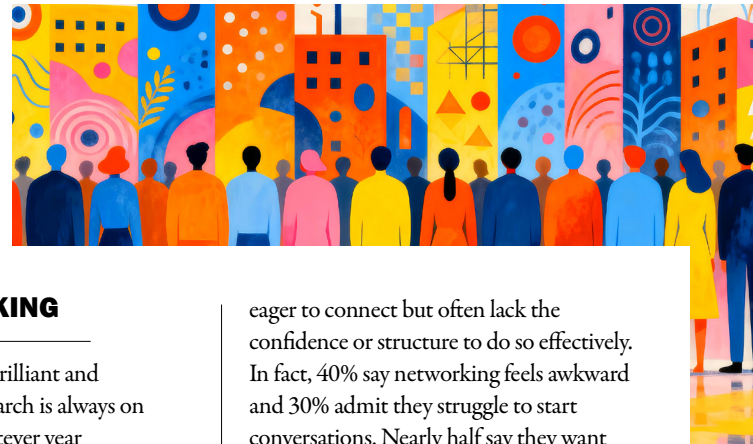
EVENTS NEED TO BE MORE LIKE PLAYS

It was standing room only at the AMEX Global Travel Trends Report session at IMEX Frankfurt back in May. Attendees were urged to use a "broaden and build" approach to event planning, starting with psychological safety.

"Event planners are now using the language of the theater, thinking in terms of acts in a play and mapping out the emotional journey they want attendees to experience. They're asking themselves, how are we designing the first act to offer a peak emotional moment. Where will we build in time and space for rest and relaxation? And where is our lasting emotional resonance coming from?" said Sofia Eriksson, AMEX's Director of Sales EMEA, Meetings & Events.

WE SAY: Expect to see a lot more emotional design in event planning in 2026 and be alert for multi-sensory design impacts too. *See 12.*

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NO TO NETWORKING

Freeman's consistently brilliant and thought-provoking research is always on our must-read lists, whatever year we're in.

In Unpacking XLNC: How to Architect Serendipity and Connect People in Meaningful Ways, we learned that "purpose-driven networking is the new standard: 51% of attendees say effective networking is reason enough to return to an event. Yet nearly one-third of younger professionals—the NowGen cohort (ages 23-46)—report that current networking formats detract from value or increase anxiety. These younger professionals are

eager to connect but often lack the confidence or structure to do so effectively. In fact, 40% say networking feels awkward and 30% admit they struggle to start conversations. Nearly half say they want curated recommendations for who to meet before the event."

And this story ⁽¹⁷⁾ from Liz Lathan for #weareichi offers another perspective on how not to network. She describes her approach to building relationships without hating them. It all starts with being curious.

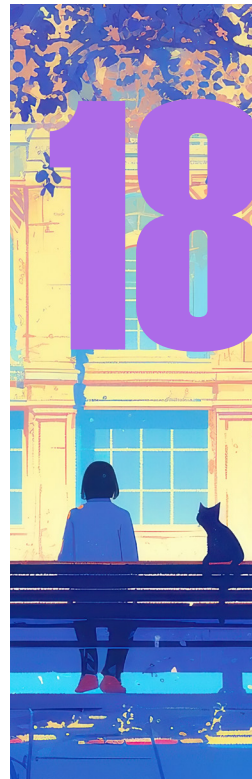
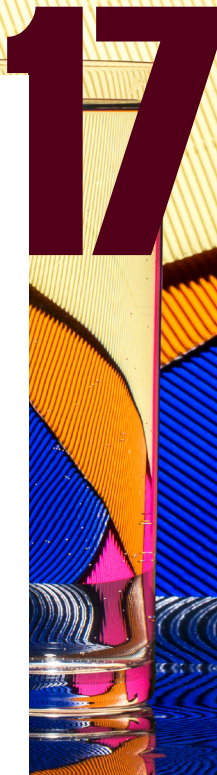
WE SAY: We were thrilled to partner with Freeman on this X Factor Report ⁽¹⁸⁾ and look forward to more collaborations in 2026.

ALCOHOL-FREE WORKS FOR ME

Sober curious people seek out other sober people in sober spaces and at sober socials. But many event organizers—and venues—haven't caught up.

There's no getting away from it, especially for boomers who were virtually raised at the hotel bar in the 80s, the age of calling "drinking," "networking" at events is stone cold gone.

For a quick and easy rundown on this new normal, read **this admittedly product promotional piece**.⁽¹⁹⁾ It captures the why, what and how of this Gen Z-led behavior (or movement?) really well.



I'M NEW HERE

We have been running first-timer welcomes at both of our trade shows for a couple of years now. This year we upped the ante.

Why? Because we all remember the (mostly) fear and dread of stepping into a large event without knowing a single soul in the room. So, we decided to change that. Our first-timer meetups are where our team says: "We see you, we feel you and we're here to help."

The IMEX-MPI-MCI Future Leaders Forum is another expression of our mission to unite and advance the global meetings industry. These Forums for students happen all over the world and throughout the year. They bring the next generation of young event professionals together in community; to meet, learn, make new friends (*frolleagues*, see 4) and to see how the industry really works.

This brilliant review⁽²⁰⁾ by Ekaterina Morazova of Florida International University captures the purpose and live experience of this program beautifully. Thanks, Ekaterina.



MOVE AND CHALLENGE ME

According to The Future Laboratory, economic instability, attention-zapping tech, loneliness, inequality and misogyny have left consumers searching for meaning. We're seeking experiences that move and challenge us—mentally, physically, emotionally.

As people search for new ways to bring meaning into their lives, brands are leaning into communities to create new forms of value. These neo-communities are less about building followings, and more about nurturing kinship.

Consumers will draw value from feeling a sense of belonging when cultural moments

are served to them and brands reward them for their loyalty or attention.

It seems to us the events industry—and events within the marketing mix—are ideally placed to bring expertise and refinement to this cultural moment.

"Nurturing community is becoming central to brand strategy, as consumers increasingly seek cultural connection, shared identity and holistic well-being. By designing spaces, programs and digital platforms that foster participation and dialogue, brands can establish themselves as anchors in the wider cultural ecosystem," Rose Coffey, Senior Foresight Analyst, The Future Laboratory.

OUR WORD OF THE YEAR? ADJACENT

Did anybody else feel worn out by “adjacent everything” this year? Meaning not quite, or close to—basically not—it seemed to sum up a world of copycats, tributes, inspired-bys and, more skeptically, a lack of originality.

Admittedly, there was humor in it too.

It might be a fool’s game, but does anybody want to predict a word that will rise to fame and then possibly sink to obscurity in 2026?

Or, given current cycles, the first two weeks of January?

Either way, let’s cheer for an upbeat and positive one.



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THE MESSY MIDDLE

According to Google’s consumer insights team, it’s never been more important for brands to understand purchasing behavior. That’s because buyer decisions are no longer linear.

As they explain, “Through our research, an updated decision-making model began to take shape. In the center of the model lies the messy middle—a complex space between triggers and purchase, where customers are won and lost.”

Though focused on online behavior, there are a few timeless lessons **here** ⁽²⁴⁾ for event planners. This is Wizard of Oz stuff. A look behind the curtain at the levers and pullies of digital marketing.

Read this and you’ll never view your Insta feed in the same light again! You might even choose a digital detox.

Also see 9.



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NOSTALGIA

The good ol’ days. Even if you didn’t live through them, it turns out some of you want to go back to them.

In the face of disruption and disconnection, the past can look cozy, simpler and easier to inhabit. That’s a distortion of course, but it doesn’t stop us. Brought up in the 90s? **Have you seen this throw-back video with a meaningful message for 2026?** ⁽²¹⁾

We spotted **this trend last year** ⁽²²⁾ and, far from running out of steam, it’s gathered speed. Games like Grow a Garden have billions of players, and the bulk of them are children and teenagers. The tech is low-fi. The aim is to...erm...grow a garden. It’s simple. Clever. Maybe not exactly nostalgic but definitely not bleak or nihilistic. For a deeper dive into the new nostalgia, read **this Forbes piece** ⁽²³⁾ The Power and Perils of Nostalgia Marketing.

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LEAD YOURSELF FIRST

In our summer report, **How to Lead with Impact in Extreme Times** ⁽²⁵⁾, we heard from eight industry leaders.

Among many leadership gems, we learned that self-awareness is non-negotiable; integrity builds trust—and trust builds confident employees and followers. And that emotional labor is part of the job, not a side effect.

IMEX speaker, CEO of Emergent Global and author of *The Leading Edge*, Holly Ransom, explained:

“Leadership starts long before the business card... If you can’t lead your own energy, values and direction—why should anyone trust you to lead theirs? In the leadership rooms I’m in right now—whether it’s CEOs, founders, or frontline team leaders—there’s a shared understanding that we’re not leading through disruption anymore. Disruption is the environment.”



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HUMAN CRAFT AND DESIGN CONFRONTS AI

As the inevitable ascent of AI continues at a rapid pace, we consider its impact on us as human beings, says The Future Laboratory. With technology transforming education and many other fields, we must address the elephant in the room: is AI empowering us or are we becoming overly reliant on it?

Experts from the Laboratory suspect we’re starting to see a backlash against AI “work slop”. “There’s a need and an opportunity to celebrate human craft and design over a pure AI play. And to design for feeling, not function. AI can flatten culture... and it’s visible all around us.”

At IMEX we believe design matters and that it needs to be nurtured and celebrated within the global events industry.

Design by humans, for humans. For the craft, the beauty, the skill, the care and the joy of it.

We also believe good design is good business. But more on that to come...



25

THIS ONE'S ALL YOURS

When we said 25, we meant 24 + 1.
Yours!

What's your prediction for a positive
impact in 2026?

1. The Power of Experiences: Redesigning Events for Human Connection
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3. IMEXscoop
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imexevents.com/media/press-releases/google-xi-brings-all-new-colaboratory-back-to-imex-america
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weareisla.co.uk/guide/event-carbon-measurement-starter-pack-with-imex/
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14. IMEX sustainability reports
imexevents.com/our-impact/environmental-and-social-governance-for-the-event-industry#sustainability
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