

International Society for Advancement of Cytometry | CYTO
Annual Meeting

One Big Team

As the third-generation leader of the family business, Kris Herlitz has spent three decades evaluating the behind-the-scenes partnerships that make great events happen. He is an expert on what defines a successful events partnership, and why some relationships are built to stand the test of time.

A Peer's Perspective

Kris Herlitz has worked with nearly every general service contractor in the industry. He sees what makes a partnership work from the vantage point of a peer who has seen the relationship succeed and fail hundreds of times. When Kris identifies a partnership as good, it's a judgment he's earned over a professional career, not a first impression.

Three Generations, Going on Four

The Herlitz Company has managed exhibits, meetings, and sponsorships for medical, scientific, and healthcare associations for nearly 90 years. Steven K. Herlitz founded the company in 1937, noticing that his larger medical-journal advertising clients were getting undersized booths at the annual meetings they funded. His son Bruce carried the business through its publishing era. Kris joined in 1992 after catching "the bug" at a Society for Neuroscience meeting. His son, Tristan, has since joined as the fourth generation.

Partner, Not Vendor

When Kris talks about what makes a great partner, he leads with behavior. The first is a willingness to approach your problems as if they were their own. That doesn't mean absorbing a financial hit. It's a partner who responds, "Let me see what I can do on my end," who offers a workaround, who brings a solution you might not have found in time — often because they've already seen the situation on another exhibit floor.

Understanding the niche helps, but what Kris values most is a partner who can pull the right lesson from a past show and apply it under pressure, in a timely manner. For a GSC specifically, the first non-negotiable is communication. Kris doesn't prioritize instant solutions; he values the reassurance of being heard. Partnerships fail when the relationship goes cold — when you start to feel like a number, when corporate bureaucracy smothers the teamwork, or when the effort was all in winning the contract, with little left for honoring it.

Organization	International Society for Advancement of Cytometry (ISAC)
Type	Association
Industry	Biotechnology & Medical Technology
Audience	Research scientists, clinicians, technologists, industry professionals, and students
Reach	Global (International Scientific Congress)

"What makes a great vendor is when they're willing to consider your problem their problem, and work with you on a solution. They say: 'Let me see what I can do on my end,' or 'Have you tried reaching out to so-and-so,' or 'What I've seen done is this,' or 'We've worked with many medical associations, we've actually seen this happen already, here's what their workaround was...'"

— Kris Herlitz, Managing Director,
The Herlitz Company



“AEX pivoted right away. The next thing I knew, there were just mountains of crates of poster boards being lined up, set, and staged in the right area. It became an assembly line: as fast as they were going up and getting perfectly lined up, somebody was circling back to put the poster numbers on them and set up the pushpin station. It happened in about an hour. Everybody had to stop and shift gears, but nobody complained. I only heard about it later: ‘It’s done.’”

— Kris Herlitz, Managing Director, The Herlitz Company



Solving It Together

On a recent show, a lapse in communication between the program team and the exhibit management meant that abstract poster presenters had been told to set up their boards during a hot setup day. This was no place for attendees: forklifts running, carpet that needed to go down, a place even the most savvy show manager could trip. The boards were intended to go up last after the dock was closed and the hall was clear and carpeted. Instead of panicking, the AEX team kicked into gear.

“I never heard, ‘Great, Kris, you really put us into it now.’ It was: ‘It’s done. Good, we’re going back to the carpet, and it’s going to be fine.’”

—Kris Herlitz, Managing Director, The Herlitz Company

Family, Not Transaction

What stayed with Kris wasn’t the speed. It was that no one named the miss. The instinct to solve first, assign blame never is a fundamental characteristic of the partnership dynamic Kris outlines: a team that rights the ship together, rather than keeping tally. It’s why he values a GSC where he has a single point of contact but knows the on-site team by name and role — the service desk, the freight leaders, the rigging team. The best partnerships stop feeling transactional and start feeling like family.

The Long View

Kris sees emerging technology and his son Tristan’s influence driving a step-change in efficiency — systems that talk to each other, faster turnarounds, more capacity without giving up white-glove service. The industry has shifted: exhibitors have moved from “slap your logo on something” to seeking deeper engagement with attendees and measurable returns. Herlitz has responded by steering clients toward hour-long commercial tutorials that put exhibitors in front of prequalified leads, as well as more affordable options like 20-minute tech talks on the exhibit floor. The Herlitz Company is also starting to create a hands-on demo space for a younger generation missing the tactile experience. That’s an evolving operational landscape a GSC partner has to be able to support.



I like communication. I like the responses, even if it’s ‘I saw your message, I’m off-site,’ or ‘I saw your message, I’m going to get back to you.’ Sometimes you have a GSC where you put something out there, and you get a non-response for a couple of weeks, and you can lose time to something like that.

— Kris Herlitz, Managing Director, The Herlitz Company