

GovCast Episode 10: Talking Indian Rickshaw Races and Emerging Government Tech Programs

GSA's Justin Herman helps agencies navigate blockchain and and still finds time to build his own tuk-tuk.

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Justin Herman, lead of the Emerging Citizen Technology program office for the General Services Administration's Technology Transformation Services.

Justin Herman, lead of the Emerging Citizen Technology program office for the General Services Administration's Technology Transformation Services, takes GovCast through his journey of pivoted career paths, technological evolution, funk bands and tuk-tuk races.

Herman's passion for tech and communications and his story starts when the internet came to his high school, and he was tasked with building the school's first

website. This is also when Herman theorized the cross section of technology and the internet of communications — social technologies.

He later went to college to study fine arts and digital design and served as the first online editor of the school newspaper.

"In a way I kind of grew up with the technology side-by-side, but I never saw technologists as just computer science majors," Herman said.

But eventually, Herman's belief in and passion for public service pivoted his studies to international relations. His dream was to join the foreign service, so he joined Air Force ROTC and landed in the public affairs office. Herman loved — and was good at — taking complex concepts and breaking them down into something people could understand, use and create strategies from. So after the Air Force, instead of heading to the State Department, Herman went to Washington, D.C. After a few other gigs, he ended up at GSA, where he's been for seven years ushering in the "what's next" of emerging tech.

Herman talks about artificial intelligence, blockchain and all the other technologies his program office works with, but ultimately, he helps agencies unravel the unknown. He works on an individual basis with agencies, consulting and advising them on what's coming next based on programs or concepts the agency is working on, in order to take them beyond research and pilots.

Then, once that business case is made with that particular agency, Herman's program will create a governmentwide program. "That's when it hits the mainstream," Herman said.

The program office is able to find those opportunities that elevate the federal workforce and programs so that they're constantly new, evolving and critical. It's an area Herman is passionate about, and in some shape or form, has followed him throughout his career.

"Seven years is a long time to never have had a day where I felt like I was coasting, and that there wasn't something to win or lose every single day," Herman said. When he first joined GSA, Herman was tasked with helping the government understand social media and social technologies. And though his role has evolved, social tech was the original emerging tech that Herman worked on — and social media is now governed by the algorithms and emerging tech that the Emerging

Citizen Technology program focuses on today.

But social technologies and public service aren't Herman's only passions. Listen to the podcast to hear about his recent 3,500 kilometer rickshaw race in India that he started and finished solo, his time playing trumpet in what was once voted D.C.'s favorite local band, and the outlook these experiences bring.

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