

HR Mixtape: SHRM25 for HR Leaders: Top Tips, Hidden Gems, and President Biden's Keynote with Shari Simpson

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You're listening to the HR Mixtape Your podcast with the perfect mix of practical advice, thought-provoking interviews, and stories that just hit different so that work doesn't have to feel, well, like work. Now, your host, Shari Simpson.

Shari Simpson:

Hey HR friends, welcome back to another episode of HR Mixtape. I'm your host Shari Simpson and today you are getting a solo episode. Just me talking about SHRM 2025. If you've been in HR for any length of time, you already know that SHRM's annual conference is kind of like the Oscars for us. It's bold, it's big, it's energizing, and yes, sometimes a little overwhelming. So if you're attending SHRM 25 in San Diego this June, whether it's your very first time, or your fifth, or your tenth, I've got you covered. Today I want to walk you through everything I've learned after two decades in HR and more conferences than I can count. So this episode is your personal roadmap to navigating the event. The unfiltered version packed with tips you won't find in official guides. Think of this as the pep talk and prep talk that you didn't know you need.

So let's start with first timers. If this is your very first SHRM annual conference, welcome to the party. It's big, it's fast paced, and it's easy to feel like everyone else knows what they're doing. Spoiler alert, most people are just as overwhelmed as you are. First things first, what to pack. Please, please, please, I beg you, do not bring new shoes. You will be walking easily five to

10,000 steps a day, maybe more. So make sure that you bring comfortable, broken-in shoes that you trust with your life. Trust me on this one, it's a big deal. So even though we are in sunny San Diego, the session rooms will be air conditioned within an inch of your life. So bring a light jacket, cardigan, or a scarf to layer on during the day. You will thank me later about that one for sure. Also make sure you have a refillable water bottle. Hydration is going to be key. A portable phone charger is also a lifesaver. Add gum or mints, a roomy tote bag or a backpack, and either a stack of business cards, or even better, a digital QR code you can scan right from your phone to swap contact information. One of the pro tips I have for you is save your LinkedIn QR code as your phone's wallpaper. That'll make sharing your contact information even easier. Also, taking notes. If you can bring something digital to take notes with, I find that I end up using them more than just writing them on paper and a notebook that I'm going to file away when I get home. It's a good opportunity to use that iPad and email yourself those notes on a session that you really had some great ideas to bring back to the organization.

Okay, let's talk about the expo. It's massive. You could spend hours just wandering through booths and talking with vendors. The best swag that you're gonna see, things like socks, books, or tech gadgets, or even some of those custom screen-printed t-shirts with the fun HR sayings, are gonna go fast. So make sure you scope that out on opening nights. Get in those lines if swag is really important for you, because that's gonna be the night to get it. Otherwise, visit the smaller booths earlier in the day before crowds pick up and don't skip the SHRM bookstore. They often have free author signings and it's actually one of the more chill places to meet speakers and attendees who are all kind of looking for the same information. It's a great way to start a conversation around networking and getting to know people.

Here's my biggest mindset tip for you. Talk with someone new every day. Say hello in line. You're gonna be in a lot of lines. Introduce yourself before a session. I like to open up with what's been your favorite session so far. It's simple and it works and it gives you opportunity to hear what your peers are excited about.

All right, now let's zoom out a little bit. SHRM 25 officially runs from June 29th to July 2nd at the San Diego Convention Center. If you're coming in early for pre-conference workshops or the executive network experience, that starts on June 28th. The schedule itself is huge, over 375 sessions, hundreds of speakers, and learning formats that range from full keynotes to spotlight sessions, wellness breaks, and hands-on labs. Here's my best advice. Don't try to do it all. You're going to be burnt out by day two. Focus on the sessions that match your goals and even your energy level for the day. Give yourself permission to skip a session in favor of reflection or rest. It's still productive to do that so that you can give 100% when you are in the sessions that you want.

When it comes to choosing sessions, here's my rhythm. I pick one anchor session per day. This is the one session I won't miss no matter what. Then I choose two backups in case it's full or just not the right fit in the moment. I definitely make sure I build in buffer time. I try to keep at least one 30-minute block per day with nothing scheduled. That can sometimes turn into a networking talk. Sometimes it's just time to breathe and drink some water. Or as we all know, sometimes it's necessary to check our emails and check in with that home office. So make sure that you're building time into your day to do that so it doesn't feel so overwhelming.

Don't sleep on the wellness sessions. SHRM is doing a great job each year of including things like guided meditation and yoga and quiet recharging zones. 10 minutes of stillness can go a very long way in the middle of a packed day.

Okay, here's a special heads up. With President Joe Biden speaking at SHRM 25, security is going to be next level for that event. Think airport security. You'll need to arrive much, much earlier than you think. I'm sure there'll be metal detectors, ID checks, bags inspections, so make sure that you have your government-issued ID, your SHRM badge, and if you can, avoid bringing a large bag that day to anything. I'm sure we will find more information about that, but you'll move much faster with less hassle if you just bring minimal items to that event. Additionally, cell service might get spotty near that security zone, so make sure you preload your schedule, download any session materials you might want to have while you're in there, and screenshot your

agenda just in case you can't access the app. I'm sure the keynote will likely be a highlight of the event, so treat it as the main event that day. Plan around it accordingly and make sure you plan ahead to get to that session early.

All right, let's talk about networking a little bit, because I know some of you just broke out in a sweat. It doesn't have to be awkward. Sit with new people. If you came with coworkers, split up for a few sessions. Trust me, you're going to have more to talk about at lunch with people than necessarily in a session. So make sure that you're doing that. Additionally, look for meetups in the app or on LinkedIn or on Facebook on the unofficial SHRM conference group. If you haven't seen that, it's definitely worth checking out. Comment on other attendees' posts on social. Make sure you're using SHRM's official hashtag, SHRM25. So if you see someone post about a session you loved, tell them. I think that's how professionals can connect together and get started in a more organic way. One of my favorite hacks is to take a selfie at a booth or a panel or with a new contact and tag them later. It's an easy way to follow up without sending that kind of formal stuffy email.

Okay, let's not forget you're actually in San Diego. The Convention Center sits right on the water. You can walk to the Gaslamp Quarter, grab dinner in Little Italy, or even sneak a trip to the beach. If you arrive earlier, stay late. Plan one night for yourself if you can. No networking, no sessions, just decompress, get outside, order something delicious, and enjoy the energy of the city. You definitely earned it.

Okay, let's bring it home. Pack smart, pace yourself, and prioritize your energy. Pick sessions that speak to your current season, introduce yourself to someone new, and leave space for the moments you can't plan for. Those are often the best ones. And one last thing before I let you go. While you're at SHRM 25, give back. We're to pack 10,000 sensory bracelets local Y. M. C. A. I to give back and be part. If you want a printable checklist, packing guide, daily scheduled templates to help you prep for SHRM, make sure you shoot me a direct message. I got you. I will give you those resources.

As always, thanks for tuning in today. If you see me at the conference, come say hi. I'd love to connect in person, and I'll see you all in San Diego in a couple weeks. I hope you enjoyed today's episode. You can find show notes and links at thehrmixtape.com. Come back often, and please subscribe, rate, and review.