

Check Out Nancy Brimhall's Story



LOCAL STORIES



Today we'd like to introduce you to Nancy Brimhall.

Hi Nancy, it's an honor to have you on the platform. Thanks for taking the time to share your story with us – to start, maybe you can share some of your backstory with our readers.

Think about all the times you sat through a lecture, PowerPoint slide show, plowed through a textbook with your yellow marker, or listened to an “expert” talk to your team. If you were lucky, you had an engaging speaker, and everyone relaxed and listened for a bit. Sooner rather than later, you were doodling and wondering when the lunch break was. Even if you loved the topic, sat rapt for the full half-day or the two hours, or... if you were asked to write down what were the main points you learned, you might think of a couple you liked. If you were asked to write down which of those you had brought inside your brain to make something you used to do become better because of what you learned, like most of us, give it two weeks, and you wouldn't even really remember more than one idea you heard, Give it another two weeks and even the best intentions still meant that nothing had changed in your approach.

Unfortunately, today, too many of us have built conference attendance, lectures, videos, or subject-focused training around things that had good intentions but never happened. And no one seems to hold us accountable.

When you put it together with how much in our world needs to change today – wars, hunger, homelessness, access, environment, civic duty, justice, poverty, children and elder care, and quality education – how does change actually happen?

I decided in November 2018 that I was going to start on my own mission to understand how people really learn. I wanted to completely change the way I had been doing educational trainings. Because I had worked in increasing leadership positions in the nonprofit community for three decades, I knew that to start there was tantamount to a groundswell of engagement. Voila. Ask me anything today about gamification and immersive, active learning. No secret. That's the button to push.

Would you say it's been a smooth road, and if not, what are some of the biggest challenges you've faced along the way?

The biggest obstacles, and there always are, are time and funding. I'm a crazy person and have no illusions about working hard. If you want anything, it's going to be a lot of hard work. That means weekends and evenings and vacations, putting in the time. Having the planning meetings, recruiting advisors, and bringing in helpers, thinkers, and doers who believe in what you are trying to achieve. You cannot do it alone. It's only through the efforts also contributed by others.

As a woman, you find yourself always fighting to be heard. You have to speak up, engage, out-smart, cajole, hold-firm, push, compromise, re-think, shout if you must, stomp around if you like, carry on as if there is no

tomorrow, and you will find yourself where you need to be.

Most of the time, it feels like it is never fast enough, but the one thing I learned is that I had to get used to being the tortoise and not the hare. It all just takes time. Stay the course, steady the nerves, and trust in yourself. Others will follow. Don't be the bee that flits around, unsure and frantic. Be the honey they come to.

As you know, we're big fans of you and your work. For our readers who might not be as familiar with what you do, what can you tell them about what you do?

My work has always been to figure out what to with that English Major and Art Minor that my parents never wanted me to pursue. Fortunately for me, it has turned out that it's exactly what I was called to do and what a lot of people should be doing. It's about setting the foundation in place for strong communication skills. Everything else can settle in on top. I write all kinds of communication each and every day in the nonprofit field, and always have — I started out writing newsletters, emails, direct mail, telemarketing scripts, CEO briefings, presentation packets, then on to donor presentations, brochures, pamphlets, agreements, speeches, event invitations, and timed agendas, capital campaign plans and strategies, studies and on and on. I still create a lot of visual material myself just because I'm a bit fussy for sure. Communication is key. What you send to potential and current donors tells them a lot about your organization.

I have built Brimhall & Associates, my nonprofit philanthropy consulting business (and then the Change Lab project) upon providing an – engaging, warm, fun access door to solving a client's problem – together. We need to be partners to make anything successful. No one would ever describe me as someone who “keeps their cards close to their chest.” After all, I'm an

educator, first and foremost. That's how it all started. To educate at the top of the heap. That's me.

Can you tell us more about what you were like growing up?

My mother always said I was the shyest child she ever knew. I saw myself as handicapped as I was “that” kid that wore really, really, really thick “Coke bottle” glasses from age seven. Of course, by college, contact lenses had appeared, and life began anew. I think, though, I actually benefitted immensely from that experience as it gave me an affection for sitting with the smelly kids on the bus, as I heard myself once say. I didn't care if they weren't the cool kids; I liked them anyway. That's the way life should be. It just doesn't ever matter.

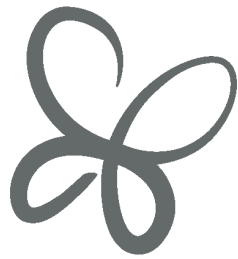
I also think being shy helps you align with good listening skills and increases your power of observation; both will help you better understand the world around you. Never underestimate those important life skills.

I liked reading immensely. If I were to walk in my home where I grew up on any given Saturday after chores were done, my sisters would be playing outside, and I would be in the living room in our big chair curled up, lost in a book. That's how I learned about life.

Fortunately, we lived across the street from our school library, and I read many, many books, grades above my level, just because it led me into a world of imagination and sophistication. I loved it and still do.

Contact Info:

- **Website:** www.changelab.studio
- **Instagram:** @yourchangelab
- **Facebook:** www.facebook.com/YourChangeLab
- **Linkedin:** <https://www.linkedin.com/company/fr/>



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Cham Zhao

Nancy Brimhall

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