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Outstanding Voices 2022: Brett Andrews, Positive Resource Center

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Editor's note: As part of our Business of Pride publication every year, the Business Times honors a dozen or more Outstanding Voices honorees. [Click here to read about our other 2022 honorees.](#)

Brett Andrews has been running the Positive Resource Center for almost



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20 years tackling some of the city's greatest challenges, from HIV to poverty and homelessness. Through a series of mergers he has helped grow the nonprofit into a budget of \$5 million to \$20 million to \$35 million over the years, providing much needed services to some of the area's most desperate populations.

Brett Andrews, CEO, Positive Resource Center

While he began in the corporate world leveraging his institutional psychology degree into a career in human resources, Andrews found his skillset was best used managing and growing nonprofits. He has jumped from leadership roles at charitable organizations in New York and Los Angeles, before making the journey to the Bay Area, which has been his home for almost two decades. He attributes his success in the nonprofit world not only to his ability to understand people, but his business acumen, taking financially struggling organizations and letting loose their potential through high value deals and expanded access to donors.

How did you get into the nonprofit sector? I started my career with Paine Webber, a financial firm in New York, in their HR department, and quickly found myself, like many of us, not liking it at all. The work was generally fine, but it was the monotony of everyday. But what the organization did have was a really great volunteer program. So they invested in a series of nonprofits and the culture was that you had to volunteer your time, and I found one that was of great interest to me. At the time they were looking for a new executive director, and I was only 28 years old. But I submitted my resume and became the executive director of Kid's N'U, which was a youth serving organization that had a culinary program teaching kids nutrition, and many of them went off to post

secondary culinary school and were employed in the restaurant industry.

What is your advice to young LGBTQ professionals and aspiring leaders? What you lack in job experience, and maybe life experience, you more than make up for in intuition. So trust your intuition. We're not taught to do that, it's not celebrated. We often think there is some formula that we have to work within in order to succeed. And sometimes things are just not fully defined. And when you listen to your most authentic self, generally, you'll make the right decision. Then the second is to find someone who truly believes in you, who wants the best for you. That may be your parents, but if it isn't, seek them out. Because they'll always be there for you particularly at the times when you don't believe in yourself.

What experiences do you have with a mentor or person that most influenced your success as an LGBTQ leader? I would say my dear friend who recently passed, Ambassador Jim Hormel, who I met in 2003 and was the youngest grandson of the Hormel fortune who came out late in life.

Like the chili? And Spam. I met him when he was in his late 70s. This was a man who had family wealth beyond and lived a great life, all of his life. What I learned from him is that all the things that I thought I was aspiring to feel equal, like money and status and success, it clearly didn't mean a thing when you were just a good person. Money wasn't his issue, money was my issue with him. I was like, "God, he's wealthy." And all he was was a very kind gentleman, and he taught me how to be more gentlemanly, and move more genteel in the world, and not aspire to things that really

aren't going to save you in the end. I went to his memorial and in his eulogy, they talked nothing about his money, talked nothing about the big houses and such. They talked more about his philanthropy and his kindness and his attentiveness that he had when he was with a person, and when he made you feel super important like you were the only person in the room.

Given what's been transpiring in some states regarding "don't say gay" or anti-trans legislation, are you hopeful for the future? I'll tell you why I'm hopeful for the future, because the efforts around anti trans and "don't say gay" are part and parcel of efforts that have been afoot for many years. So you could scratch out those descriptors and put in Black, you could put in Latino, you can put in gay, you can put in women. So there is a large coalition of people who should band together and need to band together. I've often said, if a piece of legislation had to be passed in order for you to feel equal, we're all on the same side. And the fact of the matter is unity is what will lead to success in the future.

What most needs to happen to achieve equal opportunity and a level playing field? It seems like too big of an issue, but I say start with yourself and start with your dinner table. And think about who's in your life, how you value them, how you can challenge yourself to have more gay people in your life, trans people, more women or people of color in your life. Because to not have it is for you to just have a preconceived notion of them, and not really have an understanding of them at all. So I think there's a way in which we should value every life and the only way you were able to do that is certainly not reading about it but experiencing it.

Brett Andrews
CEO, Positive Resource Center

Age: 57

Residence: San Francisco

Education: Bachelor's in psychology, Penn State; master's in industrial organizational psychology, George Washington University

Resume: Executive director, Los Angeles Team Mentoring; executive director, Kid's N'U

Family: Single, with a terrier named Mad Max

Fun fact: I love board games and fantasize about being on a competitive cooking show.

William Hicks

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