

Building Systems in Human Services

Linda A. LeBlanc, PhD

As a member of the faculty at Western Michigan University, I tried to listen and learn from my colleagues in the OBM program, especially Alyce Dickinson and John Austin. I was always interested in doing a LOT of different things and I quickly realized that my capacity to manage all of my practica, contracts, and research endeavors would be severely challenged if I didn't build sustainable systems in each arena. Each time I started a new endeavor, I intentionally started small but with a plan to at least double in size within a targeted time frame. Starting small with a plan for building infrastructure before growing allowed me to maintain a reasonable quality of services for clients and a reasonable learning experience for students. Some of these early systems efforts are described in LeBlanc (2010) and I encourage any new professor starting a practicum to see if there might be useful information for you in that article.

As I moved to Auburn University to co-lead an innovative master's program in ABA (Johnston, 2016), I was fortunate to work with another great systems builder, Jim Johnston. The notion that one could teach a student an entire master's curriculum with all of the required practicum experiences in just ONE year was mind-boggling. And yet it could be done and it was done well! The intensity of the learning experience and integration of courses and applied experience produced a really amazing result – some of the best practitioners with whom I have ever had the opportunity to work. Each and every one of them saw the power of a well-organized system which led them to make the most of every moment for 12 continuous months.

When I left the university system to become the Executive Director at Trumpet Behavioral Health, the scale of all of the other efforts suddenly seemed so small. Trumpet provides services in 9 states from Hawaii to Ohio and I was supposed to create the systems that could ensure quality and standardization in all of those locations as it grew. This did NOT match my plan to start small and plan to double in time so I had to double down on the use of OBM and systems. This was the perfect example of using systems and performance management to manage beyond your line of sight! For 5 years now, I have used OBM to streamline and disseminate clinical practice recommendations throughout our organization, including development of supervision structures, training systems, peer review systems, and more. Many of the BCBAs who come to work at Trumpet do so because of the reputation we have for incorporating OBM into our everyday practices (yes, we have a job aid for that!). Now that much of the structure is built, I will continue to refine certain aspects of clinical standards for Trumpet while branching out to help other agencies to tackle the systems issues that occur so often in our human service organizations.

In summary, I am where I am because I saw the value of OBM as a supplement and support to my knowledge and skills in other applied areas. I will get where I intend to go in the future by helping others do the same.

Johnston, J. M. (2016). Necessity and opportunity: The 1-year master's ABA program at Auburn University. *The Behavior Analyst, 39*, 135-142.

LeBlanc, L. A. (2010). Integrating behavioral psychology services into adult day programming for individuals with dementia. *Behavior Modification, 34*, 443-458.