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Interview: Empowering Entrepreneurs in Music Education: The Oboe Mobile Foundation's Vision for Accessibility

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Oboe Mobile Foundation

Empowering Entrepreneurs in Music Education: The Oboe Mobile Foundation's Vision for Accessibility (An Interview)

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Abstract

This article features an interview¹ with the Founder and CEO of Oboe Mobile Foundation, Dr. Frances Colón, a music education organization focused on the oboe. The author, as an entrepreneur and leader, shares her inspiration for establishing the foundation and innovative approaches to music education. Their personal passion for the oboe and the desire to make a positive impact drove them to create accessible programs, especially for marginalized populations. The interview explores how the author demonstrated entrepreneurial thinking, overcame challenges, fostered a culture of innovation, and collaborated with others to maximize the foundation's impact. The article also highlights the author's strategies for securing funding and resources, empowering their team, and balancing the long-term vision with day-to-day operations. The values of peace, gratitude, humility, integrity, collaboration, empathy, and perseverance are central to the author's entrepreneurial leadership style and have shaped the organizational culture and success of Oboe Mobile Foundation.

Keywords: Oboe Mobile Foundation, Music education, Entrepreneurial leadership, Innovation, Accessible programs, Collaboration

Abstract (Español)

Este artículo presenta una entrevista con la Fundadora y CEO de la Oboe Mobile Foundation, la Dra. Frances Colón, una organización de educación musical centrada en el oboe. El autor, como emprendedor y líder, comparte su inspiración para establecer la fundación y enfoques innovadores para la educación musical. Su pasión personal por el oboe y el deseo de tener un impacto positivo los impulsaron a crear programas accesibles, especialmente para poblaciones marginadas. La entrevista explora cómo el autor demostró un pensamiento emprendedor, superó desafíos, fomentó una cultura de innovación y colaboró con otros para maximizar el impacto de la fundación. El artículo también resalta las estrategias del autor para asegurar financiamiento y recursos, empoderar a su equipo y equilibrar la visión a largo plazo con las operaciones diarias. Los valores de paz, gratitud, humildad, integridad, colaboración, empatía y perseverancia son fundamentales para el estilo de liderazgo emprendedor del autor y han dado forma a la cultura organizacional y al éxito de la Oboe Mobile Foundation.

¹ The interview questions were submitted to Dr. Frances Colón on June 20th, 2023 at 12:49 P.M. ET and were returned with her completed responses on June 23rd, 2023 at 10:26 A.M.

Palabras clave: Oboe Mobile Foundation, educación musical, liderazgo emprendedor, innovación, programas accesibles, colaboración.

As an entrepreneur and leader, what inspired you to establish Oboe Mobile Foundation and pursue innovative approaches to music education, specifically focusing on the oboe?

As an entrepreneur and leader, my inspiration to establish the Oboe Mobile Foundation and pursue innovative approaches to music education, specifically focusing on the oboe, stems from a combination of personal passion, a desire to make a positive impact, and recognizing an opportunity to address a need in the field of music education in relation to the oboe.

As a professional oboist, I have a deep personal connection to the oboe and a genuine love for music as music is my life. This passion is what drives me to share with others the joy and beauty of this amazing instrument, the oboe, creating musical experiences and making them accessible to marginalized populations. Inspiration to establish Oboe Mobile Foundation came when I won the Principal Oboe Chair at the Puerto Rico Symphony Orchestra. This was the first time someone from Puerto Rico had won this important position. I started a personal journey as an entrepreneur and leader, driven by a desire to create something new and impactful, utilizing my position to create and serve. The oboe is an instrument that is known to a few people. I identified an opportunity and the need to educate others about this instrument and created innovative, interactive programs to increase the population of oboe enthusiasts and motivate students to play the oboe.

When I was a student in a music magnet school in Puerto Rico, I had a uniquely personal experience where there were no quality oboes available in my school and no equipment provided to make oboe reeds. Despite this limitation, I developed a deep passion for the oboe and was determined to learn and play the instrument. This personal journey made me aware of the need in the field of music education and the oboe and inspired me to establish the Oboe Mobile Foundation, driven by the vision that every child should have access to the necessary resources and opportunities to explore and embrace the oboe.

How have you demonstrated entrepreneurial thinking in the development and growth of Oboe Mobile Foundation, and what strategies or initiatives have you implemented to ensure its sustainability?

I have demonstrated entrepreneurial thinking in the development and growth of Oboe Mobile Foundation by thinking outside the box and creating programs after identifying the need for them. The Oboe Mobile in the Community program has activities that were developed and established creatively using entrepreneurial thinking. All these activities are meeting a need and have been implemented to ensure that Oboe Mobile Foundation is relevant and sustainable.

An example of a wonderful strategy that I have implemented to ensure the organization's sustainability is establishing partnerships and collaborating with individuals and organizations. This has increased our network and we are able to assist others as well, which is part of what I love to do.

Can you share an example of a specific challenge or obstacle you encountered as an entrepreneurial leader of Oboe Mobile Foundation and how you overcame it with your creative problem-solving skills?

As an entrepreneurial leader of the Oboe Mobile Foundation, I encounter a significant challenge when the organization faces a shortage of funding to support its mission of providing mobile education solutions to underprivileged communities. This obstacle threatens the sustainability and growth of the foundation and requires my creative problem-solving skills to overcome it.

To tackle this challenge, I have employed several strategies to secure additional funding and ensure the continuity of your organization's operations. I approached the problem in various ways, beginning with taking courses to educate myself in nonprofit governance, fundraising, and managing an organization. I learned that I had to diversify funding resources. Using my creative problem-solving skills, I brainstormed and identified various potential funding sources. I contacted the National Endowment for the Arts to learn about their educational services or programs to learn about grant writing. This experience led me to an invitation from the NEA to serve as a grant evaluator, which gave me the knowledge to learn the art of grant writing. This incredible initiative gave me the knowledge to write grants and has resulted in several grants being awarded to Oboe Mobile Foundation.

I also learned that diversification included identifying and reaching out to corporate sponsors, and foundations, and exploring crowdfunding platforms. By diversifying our funding streams, I reduced the risk of relying on a single funding source and increased the chances of securing financial support. Granted, fundraising is a challenge for an arts organization, but knowledge is power, so being creative, open, curious, receptive, and studious has helped.

In your role as an entrepreneurial leader, how do you foster a culture of innovation and adaptability within Oboe Mobile Foundation to respond to the evolving needs and demands of the music education landscape?

In my role as an entrepreneurial leader, I lead by example modeling the behaviors I want to see in the organization and the world. I continue to learn and study, fostering a learning environment that contributes to improvement and growth. I encourage open communication where everyone feels comfortable sharing their ideas, concerns, and suggestions. I am an active listener who provides constructive feedback. I also encourage collaboration with other individuals and organizations, which contributes to new ideas and initiatives.

In addition, I see every problem or challenge as an opportunity for growth and learning. It gives me joy to empower others and assist them to improve themselves. I stay current on research, trends, and developments in the music education field and foster relationships with educators locally, nationally, and internationally and seek feedback from stakeholders to refine my approach. I am always willing to adapt to align with the challenging demands of our reality as islanders and that of the music education landscape. We gather, evaluate, and adapt. This is an important practice to assess the effectiveness of my strategies, processes, and initiatives.

What strategies or approaches have you employed to effectively collaborate with other organizations, individuals, or stakeholders to maximize the impact and reach of Oboe Mobile Foundation's programs?

- To effectively collaborate with other organizations, individuals, and stakeholders to maximize the impact and reach of Oboe Mobile Foundation's programs and ensure that no child is left behind, I have employed several strategies and approaches. I have established alliances with schools, communities, and even remote areas to expand the reach of our programs. These alliances involve working closely with educational institutions, community centers, and local organizations to identify potential participants and create opportunities for engagement.
- I have also organized workshops, masterclasses, and interactive sessions to expose our audience to the oboe utilizing music from our culture making the experience a relevant and accessible one to all.
- Recognizing the importance of mentorship and guidance, I collaborate with music educators and professional oboists. By inviting them to share their expertise, I have provided students with valuable insights and learning opportunities. These collaborations enhance the quality of education and foster the growth of young talents.
- To bring a comprehensive learning experience to the communities we serve, I have established alliances with municipalities in Puerto Rico. These alliances involve the contribution of assets and resources from each organization involved. By pooling together these resources we provide the necessary elements to ensure a conducive learning environment.
- Recognizing the importance of reaching children in remote areas, I have made efforts to extend our programs beyond urban centers. This includes organizing workshops and events in remote communities, where access to music education and resources might be limited.

By employing these strategies and approaches, I have effectively collaborated with various organizations, individuals, and stakeholders to maximize the impact and reach of Oboe Mobile Foundation's programs.

Can you provide an example of a project or initiative where you utilized entrepreneurial leadership principles to successfully secure funding or resources to support the Oboe Mobile Foundation's mission and goals?

Vision, passion, opportunity recognition, innovation, and creativity are some of the entrepreneurial leadership principles that I have used to secure resources to support the Oboe Mobile Foundation's mission and goals. For example, the Oboe Bank program was established with the vision that every child, regardless of their background or economic circumstances, could have access to a high-quality oboe and had the means to pursue their passion. The establishment of an Oboe Bank was an extremely creative solution to the lack of oboes in the schools and provided students with an opportunity to have an instrument that they could take home and practice. The Oboe Bank now has instruments of all levels, which allows parents the opportunity to save for an instrument while

their child has access to an oboe from the Oboe Bank. This was all done through fundraising, from private donors and corporations.

How do you inspire and empower your team and instructors at Oboe Mobile Foundation to embrace an entrepreneurial mindset and take ownership of their roles in driving the organization's success?

I inspire and empower my team and instructors at Oboe Mobile Foundation to embrace an entrepreneurial mindset and take ownership of their roles in driving the organization's success by clearly articulating the vision and mission of Oboe Mobile Foundation. I take the time to explain and have conversations on how their individual roles contribute to the organization's success. In addition, I make them aware of the impact they can make in driving social change and creating a positive impact through their work. I lead by example. As an entrepreneurial leader, I take risks, I am innovative, and embrace challenges with positivism and love.

As an entrepreneurial leader, how do you balance the long-term vision and sustainability of Oboe Mobile Foundation with the day-to-day operational challenges and decision-making processes?

As an entrepreneurial leader, balancing the long-term vision and sustainability of Oboe Mobile Foundation with the day-to-day operational challenges and decision-making processes is crucial for the organization. It is important to establish a long-term vision, aligned with the mission of the organization. This vision will be the driving force of all decisions and actions. It is also important to communicate effectively with all involved as everyone will serve the organization with their talents or abilities. Setting goals that align with the long-term vision that includes short-term efforts and activities assists in the balancing act. It is important to use resources effectively keeping this long-term vision in mind. I always seek advice from people that have the expertise on what I am working on or what I will be in the future. Everything can change; therefore, I am always open to adapting a concept, or an idea in the best interest of the organization, evaluating, reassessing, and adjusting as necessary.

Can you share a story or experience where you applied your leadership skills to overcome a significant setback or adversity faced by Oboe Mobile Foundation, and how that experience shaped your approach to leadership?

The passing of two major hurricanes through the island: Irma and Maria, the occurrence of major earthquakes, a major pandemic, and most recently daily intermittent power outages throughout the entire island have had a tremendous impact on Oboe Mobile Foundation; our student population, our supporters and audience. Citizens struggle as poverty in Puerto Rico has become a chronic issue. Before these crises, past workshops exceeded the standard for participants and people served. Resources are limited and the level of oboe students on the island is low, in comparison to the mainland. There are only a handful of music programs with oboe teachers, all located mainly in the metropolitan area. The remainder of music programs are underserved, and lacking oboe specialists. The specific problem we face at Oboe Mobile Foundation is the student and community

engagement, as people have more important life issues to take care of after all that has happened. I believe the biggest challenge is to create awareness about our instrument throughout the entire island, to bring music to communities in need, and to continue to represent the island's oboe community in ways that are creative and consonant with our new realities.

As the leader of the Oboe Mobile Foundation, I knew it was crucial to meet with my team to find a way to overcome this new reality. I established a supportive environment where everyone knew their views would be respected and their points of view heard. Committed to the organization's mission, I presented a new approach that included activities for the early childhood population. An innovative approach that would allow us to reconstruct the organization once again in service to our community. I created a plan to put into place this new approach. This plan included fundraising, establishing strategic partnerships, finding volunteers who support us, and searching for new funding opportunities and sources of income to overcome this significant setback.

The results are promising. Thanks to this experience, I learned the importance of resilient leadership and the power of teamwork. My positive outlook, resilience, empathetic and inclusive approach have served everyone well as it is motivational and inspirational to them. Once again, the challenges that we have faced are transforming the organization allowing us to continue serving our community with music, love, and the use of the oboe.

How do you incorporate the values of peace, gratitude, humility, integrity, collaboration, empathy, and perseverance into your entrepreneurial leadership style, and how have these values influenced the organizational culture and success of Oboe Mobile Foundation?

The values of peace, gratitude, humility, integrity, collaboration, empathy, and perseverance are part of my personality and by default of my entrepreneurial leadership style. As a result, these values are present in the organizational culture of Oboe Mobile Foundation as these values promote a healthy, harmonious coexistence. Attributed to Mahatma Gandhi is the following quote: "Be the change you wish to see in the world." Peace, gratitude, humility, integrity, collaboration, empathy, and perseverance are values that I wish to see in the world; therefore, I live and promote them to live in harmony and above all Love.

About the Author



Dr. Frances Colón is a distinguished Puerto Rican oboist, teacher, and performer. She holds the distinction of being the first oboist in Puerto Rico to achieve a Doctorate in Musical Arts and has served as the principal oboe of the Puerto Rico Symphony Orchestra. Dr. Colón is also renowned for her contributions to teaching and establishing a nonprofit foundation, Oboe Mobile Foundation, to promote oboe education on the island.