

dear residents

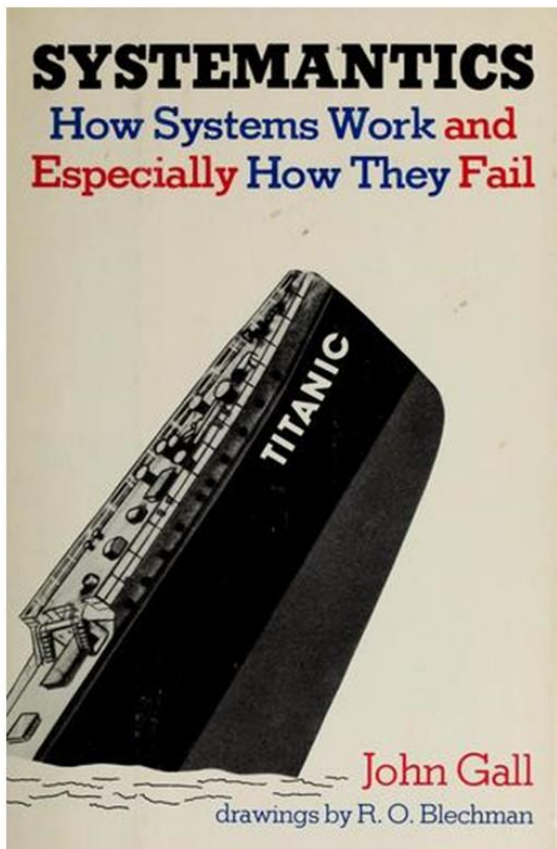
Why Good Systems Grow: Applying Gall's Law to Residency Design

Nov. 30, 2025

Dear Residents,

I hope everyone had a wonderful Thanksgiving. A big thank you to those who worked over this period.

Every so often I find myself thinking about how systems, whether natural, human, or educational, actually change. Not the sudden kind of change that arrives with sweeping proclamations, but the slow and steady kind that accumulates over years, shaping the landscape almost without our noticing. In reflecting on this, I keep returning to an idea from systems theory known as **Gall's Law**: *complex systems that work are almost always the product of simpler systems that worked well enough to grow.*



When I think back to my own residency, the contrast with today is striking. We had no work hour restrictions, no guaranteed days off, and no night float system. Call was call. You stayed until the work was done, whatever the hour, whatever the day. That was the system we inherited. It was simple, in a way, but not always humane, and certainly not structured around recovery, learning science, or long-term well-being.

Then came accelerating change. In July 2003, the ACGME introduced the first formal nationwide duty hour requirements, and the ground shifted beneath every program in the country. Since then, we've lived through two decades of continual adaptation: caps on hours, limitations on overnight call, increased attention to fatigue, the rise of night float, new supervision rules, and evolving expectations about the outpatient experience. No era of residency training has been asked to evolve more quickly than yours.

And yet, through all that change, Gall's Law has quietly held true: progress has depended not on dismantling the system but on helping it learn and mature.

I'm also reminded that this is how living systems evolve. Species do not leap from simplicity to complexity in a single generation. Small, almost random mutations appear. Most fade away. But occasionally, one confers a slight advantage in an environment under pressure. Over time, through selection, that small change becomes woven into the architecture of life itself. Complexity is not designed all at once. It is *discovered*, tested, and retained through experience. In many ways, our residency evolves the same way through countless small adaptations, shaped by the pressures of patient care, regulation, fatigue, learning, and time.

When I look at our own program, I see that same pattern of evolution. We began as a primarily inpatient residency with a single month of subspecialty clinics (the "ambulatory block"). Over time, we expanded outpatient exposure, blended inpatient and ambulatory blocks (the "hybrids"), and moved from weekly half-day clinics to the 4+1 model you know today. None of these shifts happened in one sweeping act. Each was a single, careful adjustment - a small step that made the next step possible.

Now we are again at a moment where the system is nudging us toward its next stage of growth. I've been thinking about whether our 4+1 structure might eventually evolve into a 4+2 model. Not because what we have is broken (it works well) but because the needs of trainees, the rhythm of clinical practice, and the expectations around continuity continue to move.

If that change ever comes, it will follow the same philosophy that has guided every successful transformation we've made:

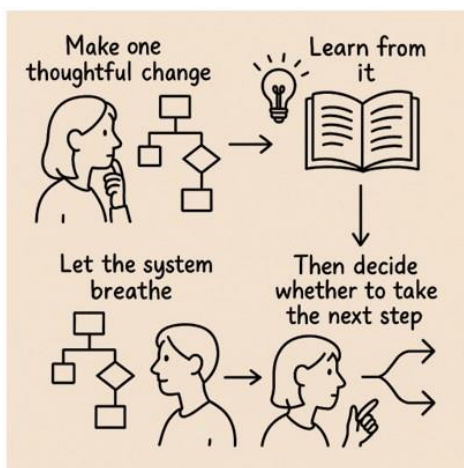


Illustration drawn by ChatGPT

Residency programs, like people, grow through lived experience. They learn from imperfections, adapt to new realities, and remain in constant conversation with the world around them. If we're attentive, the system becomes wiser over time.

Thank you for being part of that ongoing evolution. Your feedback, your honesty, and your daily lived experience shape this program more than any schedule template ever could. You are not just participants in the system - you are its co-authors.

With gratitude,

Dino Kazi