

# Systems Snapshot Q&A



## Alan Ticotsky

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### Q: How were you first introduced to systems thinking?

**A:** In 1997 I was a teacher at a school in Carlisle, Massachusetts. We received a grant from what was then the Waters Foundation. My colleague Rob Quaden and I were lucky enough to have the release time to become mentors and eventually create a systems thinking program. Waters Foundation leadership facilitated a multi-day workshop for all staff and I was able to spend a week at Trinity College in Vermont. Over time I attended a series of mentor meetings and workshops. I was fully immersed in systems thinking that year. I hit the ground running after that.

### Q: Which Habit of a Systems Thinker do you wish everyone practiced?

**A:** *A system's structure generates its behavior.* I chose this one because when we are faced with complexity, instead of jumping to "Who is to blame?" it helps us understand the structures that are creating these behaviors. Many of the other Habits come from this core principle.

### Q: Which leader (past or present) do you admire most and why?

**A:** I'll mention one of my favorite system dynamicists, Barry Richmond, who is sadly no longer with us. I was profoundly influenced by him and he helped bridge the gap between system dynamics and systems thinking. He was able to relate to and teach all types of people, those from technical backgrounds, system dynamicists, teachers, young children, and so on. Barry also developed the popular and accessible modeling software, Stella.

### Q: What is one book you think everyone should read?

**A:** Barry Richmond's book, *An Introduction to Systems Thinking*. It came with my first copy of Stella. It covers stock and flow diagramming as well as his famous explanation of systems thinking skills.

### Q: What advice do you have for someone getting started as a systems thinker?

**A:** Find a mentor and/or a partner. This really accelerated my own systems thinking learning. Also, take advantage of the many resources available online. This includes from the Waters Center, Creative Learning Exchange (my colleagues and publishers), and so many more.

### Q: Why do you think the world needs systems thinkers?

**A:** It's difficult to understand complexity. As a teacher, it was even more difficult to avoid oversimplifying concepts for kids to try to make sense of things. But systems thinking allows us to ask good questions and to not shy away from the controversial. Systems thinkers will help us find ways to reduce conflict, live harmoniously with each other and the natural world.

Check out Alan Ticotsky's recently published book, *Now What? A Call to Action*, available here: <http://www.clexchange.org/nowwhat/>

Alan is also the co-author of *The Shape of Change*:  
<http://www.clexchange.org/cleproducts/shapeofchange.asp>

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