

Systems Snapshot Q&A



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Q: How were you first introduced to systems thinking?

A: The ground was paved for systems thinking when I was a science teacher and when I did some coaching training that involved evocative thinking. More formally, I was introduced to systems thinking in the spring of 2022 when I presented on teacher resilience at the Arizona Science Teachers Association Summer Symposium. It was at this event that Sheri Marlin of the Waters Center guided the group through a journey of weaving together science content and teacher resilience through the lens of systems thinking, specifically cause and effect.

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

A: *Considers How Mental Models Affect Current Reality and the Future.* The work that I do with clients, whether they are teachers or otherwise, is all about going beneath the surface. This, of course, includes looking at mental models. I am always asking, "What beliefs about yourself, others, this situation, etc. are driving your behaviors, actions and decision-making?" One of the key indicators that signals to me a person has a mental model in place is the word, *should*. For example, when someone says, "I *should* be this," or "I *should* be doing this," it's an opportunity to reflect and ask, "Why do you think this? What might your mental model around this be?" And importantly, "Is this perspective serving you or holding you back?"

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

A: There are so many leaders I admire, but the one that comes to mind first is Brené Brown. She is helping people to lead others by looking at internal and external systems within organizations, companies, churches, communities ... the list goes on and on. She looks at belonging and vulnerability as important functions of systems and gives guidance on how to use these functions to change and create the types of systems we'd like to see. Prior to Brené Brown, looking at belonging and vulnerability, especially in the workplace, was not talked about, and was even taboo. She's really broken down barriers.

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

A: This answer relates to my previous answer: *Daring Greatly*, by Brené Brown. I consider it required reading for every human being! It lays so much of the groundwork on vulnerability, connection, and belonging that her more recent work and books cover. It's such a great starting point for your own personal journey inward. Highly, highly recommend.

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

A: So much of systems thinking is about going beneath the surface and really being aware of what you're seeing and experiencing—whether it be positive or negative. So I would say, start there. Slow down your thinking and take the time to look inward. Act as a curious anthropologist for your own self! The Iceberg is a great tool for this.

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

A: To be honest, this is kind of a tough question to answer because to me, it is pretty obvious: we need systems thinkers to survive! It's incredibly challenging to navigate through our complex world. If you want to do so in a responsible, thoughtful and meaningful way, it absolutely requires systems thinking. Even if you don't know the language or the tools, it's imperative you have skills to think about things in complex ways.