

Systems Snapshot Q&A



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Q: How were you first introduced to systems thinking?

A: Around six or seven years ago, I attended an annual meeting for early childhood specialists who work in state government. The morning session was facilitated by Tracy Benson of the Waters Center for Systems Thinking. There were well over 100 of us in attendance and we were all in awe playing with pencils, rubber bands, feathers, and slinkies talking about perspective and mental models. I love manipulatives and being active so this session (and systems thinking!) really resonated with me. I've been talking about this experience and using the Habits cards that were introduced to me that day ever since.

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

A: I think they are all worthy. It really depends where you are in your work and in your life. I keep the Habits cards on my desk and when I am in meetings I shuffle through them and pull the cards out that I feel are pertinent to the issue being discussed and can spark deeper thinking. The Habit I pull out most often is probably *Considers Short-Term, Long-Term and Unintended Consequences of Action*. This is especially relevant to my work where I am always asking colleagues questions to help us fully understand possible consequences of policies we implement.

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

A: Dr. Jaqueline Jones, former Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Early Learning at the U.S. Department of Education and now former President of the Foundation for Child Development. Dr. Jones has such a passion for bringing people together to help gain perspective about how to solve really big issues in the early childhood world. She inspires me to think big and to collaborate with lots of different people. I admire her a lot.

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

A: I'm not a big reader - I am a much more visual person. I watch documentaries and draw often. That said, I read segments or chapters of books and quick, inspirational quotes. Some of my favorites are: *The Brain: The Story of You*, by David Eagleman; *The Art of Coaching*, by Elena Aguilar; and *Wisdom of Frogs*, compiled by Franchesca Ho Sang.

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

A: Play and have fun with it. Think of the Habits cards as a card game. Have them available and refer to them often. Also, have a journal nearby so you can take notes and draw to help you become more aware of what's happening in your conversations or meetings. You can learn so much about others and yourself this way.

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

A: Our world is made up of more than humans, but it is humans that need to make the connection between our impact on the planet, each other, and every living thing. If we don't have systems thinkers, our planet, the humans, and all that we know to exist are in jeopardy. We simply can't exist without systems thinkers.