

Systems Snapshot Q&A



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Q: How were you first introduced to systems thinking?

A: About 10 years ago I was working for Twin Rivers Unified School District here in California. They brought in the Waters Center to do systems thinking learning sessions for all district leaders and learning coaches. I was a new principal at the time and I was pretty overwhelmed with my new role! Systems thinking was so helpful in grounding me in the work and in my life at the time.

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

A: I wish I could say all of them! But anyone who knows me would say I am all about "Mental Models." When working with others, tackling a challenge, or just generally approaching a situation, it's crucial to think about, "What mental model am I holding?" Equally so, it's important to ask that question of others to help build an understanding of diverse perspectives. I am always asking people to "Walk me up your ladder," so I can understand their thinking.

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

A: My former boss, Dr. Sara Noguchi, Superintendent of Modesto City Schools. She is willing to challenge her own mental models. When I worked with her, she modeled this for us as a team. She is a reflective leader and someone who is not afraid to say, "I may need to rethink this" where appropriate. It takes a lot of self-awareness and comfort with who you are to challenge your thinking.

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

A: Anything by Elena Aguilar. Right now my team is reading *The Art of Coaching*. Aguilar is a systems thinker through and through and focuses a lot on relationships, structures and mental models in her work.

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

A: Just start. Be willing to learn as you go. Use the language and apply it where you can. It may feel uncomfortable at first, but everyone is capable of becoming a systems thinker.

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

A: We can get really stuck in our perspectives and mental models. By working to understand our own mental models and the mental models of others, we can understand each other better and work better together. The other piece of this is taking the time to pause and reflect – when we have a million tasks to complete, it's easy to fall into the trap of, "go, go, go" without really thinking things through and reflecting on the actions we take.