

# Systems Snapshot Q&A



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

**A:** About 15 years ago, our district, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools in North Carolina, contracted with the Waters Center. The superintendent at the time had heard great things and was very excited to learn more. It was a voluntary opportunity, and any school that wanted to participate in the learning had to bring a team – around five or so people. A colleague and I formed a team and it was an incredible experience. I learned so much and have never looked back!

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

**A:** *Structure generates behavior.* I see this Habit as the core for all of the others and I think it promotes collaboration and problem solving. Not to mention, it eliminates blame. If you're blaming others rather than looking at the structure of the system, you really aren't able to identify the source of the problem.

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

**A:** John Wooden, a basketball coach who spent 27 seasons at the University of California, Los Angeles. He was all about servant leadership. He thought of people first and treated everyone fairly. He was a motivator by nature and importantly, did a lot for desegregation and integration in basketball.

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

**A:** *Walk Two Moons*, by Sharon Creech. It's a beautifully written book with so many bits of wisdom. One of my favorite quotes from the book is, "You can't keep the birds of sadness from flying over your head, but you can keep them from nesting in your hair." I think about this often. Bad things will happen, but you can prevail.

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

**A:** Find one thing that you can grab hold of and start there. Hold tightly to it and focus on it until it makes sense. Once you understand a specific tool or Habit of systems thinking, it will lead you to others because they are all connected. You don't need to know it all to get started! I still don't know it all and I have been practicing systems thinking for a long time. It's a journey.

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

**A:** Because we don't function in isolation. Everything impacts everything else. Sometimes we try to make order of things by looking at them in silos – but that is not reality. We need to look at the big picture and understand that things are not linear. Life (and systems) can be messy!