

Systems Snapshot Q&A



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Q: How were you first introduced to systems thinking?

A: I grew up on a kibbutz commune in Israel where everyone played an important role in the community. We were all part of a larger whole and had responsibilities to keep the system structure in place. There was a deep level of interdependence and it was such an organic way of living and breathing systems thinking.

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

A: *Structure generates behavior.* It's such an honest and human way to think about our individual behavior, motivations, actions, and to make sense of the fact that we are never operating in a vacuum. This notion gives me so much grace for myself and others – it's given me peace in hard times.

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

A: The person that comes to mind is Bryan Stevenson. He is the founder of the Equal Justice Initiative, among many other accolades, and professionally, he is a death row defense attorney. He came to mind because he does such critical work trying to bring dignity, hope and justice to people who are at the furthest margins of our society – those who we have condemned to death. He presses us to consider this question: *It is not whether the person deserves to die, but whether we as a society have the right to kill.* So much of his thinking and work is through a systems thinking lens.

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

A: A novel called *Homegoing*, by Yaa Gyasi. We so often look to scholars for systems thinking knowledge, but some of the best, juiciest academic conversations I have with students come out of stories of people experiencing and triumphing over oppressive systems. *Homegoing* is one of many books I will have students take a handful of pages from and use the Habits of a Systems Thinker cards to spark rich conversations.

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

A: One of my greatest mentors used to always say, "Go slow to go far." Systems thinking requires us to unlearn things and unsee the world as we always have through mental models. It's challenging. To me, it doesn't really matter where you start, just that you persist. Get curious and go from there!

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

A: I believe systems thinking is the key to unlocking opportunities for equity and democracy. The challenges we face are so big and so complex that if we tinker around or try to take on the burden without the support and perspectives of others, we will not accomplish what is needed. It's like the metaphor of arranging the curtains on the Titanic – we have to focus our energy on the critical crises at hand. Systems thinkers can help us solve issues of oppression and inequity.