

Systems Snapshot Q&A



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Q: How were you first introduced to systems thinking?

A: I was looking for resources to develop my son's critical thinking because he's very analytical and an active thinker. He wants to know the "why" and the "what" along with the data, so I was looking for something to supplement those aspects of his thinking. After searching on the internet, I came across systems thinking. We quickly moved on to a discussion of the benefits that can result from adopting the Habits of a Systems Thinker. He started putting into practice some of the Habits, especially "Seeks to understand the big picture," "Changes perspectives to increase understanding," and "Considers short-term, long-term, and unintended consequences of actions," because of his interest in chess and puzzles.

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

A: Every single one of them! Recognizing that not all problems are the same can help you use the Habits in new ways. Once you put the effort into learning the Habits and applying them in a variety of settings, you'll see how beneficial they are. I think you need to learn all of them, just not all of them at once! Start by picking the ones that are relatable to a problem you have. Eventually, I really think you need to learn all of them in order to grasp what they can all do for you.

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

A: The co-leader of my household, my wife, is the person I admire most in the world. The reasons being that she has a good heart; she is dedicated to a fault; she is gentle, but she can also be fierce, which I find incredibly appealing. She is also very sympathetic, and she teaches me more than I could express. She is far from perfect, but I find her perfect in her flaws. I would say she is the most admirable person in my life, past and present.

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

A: *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a #@&!: A Counterintuitive Approach to Living a Good Life*, by Mark Manson. The overarching concept is that self-improvement is beneficial, but the other half of the battle is self-healing and self-acceptance. The book is about not being apathetic. It says we're all a little too insecure, a little too hard on ourselves, and too attached to the past, but we're all a work in progress. Just because we're not perfect does not mean we should deny ourselves happiness in the present moment. So the takeaway is to pay attention to the details that truly matter in life and not "give a #@&!" worrying about the things that don't.

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

A: That goes back to the second question: don't stress yourself out trying to learn everything all at once. First, spend time trying to comprehend and master the Habits that are most relatable to you. The next step is to gradually expand your scope to identify how the Habits' concepts are all related to each other. And this is just a plug: I feel that the Waters Center is home to an expansive collection of systems thinking resources and online courses.

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

A: The world needs people, especially children, who can think about how things work as a whole, because it helps when dealing with the complexity of a world that is changing quickly. Young minds can learn how different things work together and affect each other if they learn how systems are linked. Seeing these connections helps young people look at problems as a whole, think about the long-term effects, and come up with creative solutions. Systems thinking gives kids the skills they need to figure out how to solve hard problems. It encourages creativity, critical thinking, and adaptability, which are all important for dealing with the complicated problems they will face as they get older.