

Systems Snapshot Q&A



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Q: How were you first introduced to systems thinking?

A: There are two parts to this answer. The first part is through my background as a chemical engineer. Chemical engineers are natural systems thinkers - they are the integrators amongst other engineers and are concerned with how individual components work together to achieve the desired purpose. During my time as a chemical engineer I was most certainly practicing systems thinking, even if I didn't realize it. I came across systems thinking more formally in my work leading the NXplorers program at Shell. Our leaders challenged us to deliver an education program that helps young people deal with complex challenges and situations in our world. We spoke to different experts, including some from the Waters Center, and we came to the conclusion that systems thinking was best suited to help young people think critically and solve challenges. That's when I decided to educate myself and really understand all I could about what systems thinking is and how it can deliver benefits.

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

A: I would have to say, "Changes perspectives to increase understanding." Practicing this Habit is so powerful in every walk of life. It can help you unlock challenges and see the world in a different way. I really believe it can help us unlock secrets of the universe. I always think of what is known as the most influential environmental photograph ever taken. It's called "Earthrise," taken during the Apollo 8 mission in 1968. It not only gave us a new perspective of our planet (we saw it as it truly looks), but it is also credited with helping people see the importance of looking after Earth and the environment.

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

A: Albert Einstein. He solved so many complex problems and did so in such innovative ways. He was passionate about getting to the root of a problem and never jumped to conclusions. He also had a very inspirational journey and did not let personal challenges stand in his way of achieving greatness.

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

A: *Systems Thinking for Social Change*, by David Peter Stroh. If you really want to improve lives and improve the lives of people in challenging circumstances, you must read this book.

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

A: This is going to sound staged, but I promise it's not: attend a learning opportunity from the Waters Center! I've read tons of books and attended a course at a very prestigious university in London, and I have to say, the course I took from the Waters Center was the first time it all really clicked. They do such an outstanding job making systems thinking accessible, approachable and relatable.

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

A: We are more connected than ever and our challenges are more and more interrelated. We have huge technological advancements, population growth and finite resources. All of these things bring added complexity. Being a systems thinker means having a collaborative mindset and the ability to think critically and beyond silos. We need systems thinkers to tackle complex problems and to make our world a better place for all.