

In this lesson, we're going to tackle a very common concern among new students in The Systems Course. That concern is "I'm just not a systems person."

If that—or something like it—is a concern you've had, then you can rest easy. Most people have struggled with this before. And, importantly, most people get past it pretty quickly.

Let's take a look at what "I'm not a systems person" really means. Then, let's figure out where that sentiment came from. And when we finish that, I'll show you what it takes to change that perception and give you a little homework to make sure you really cement it.

So, what does it really mean to "not be a systems person"? Are some people just born to be calculating and routine based people while others aren't?

Maybe there's some genetics at play in how far down the rabbit hole you're inclined to go with system and routine building, but like you've already learned in previous lessons, systems are already all around you. And you *already have* many routines—both big and small—that make your life work the way it does.

So, when you say you're "not a systems person," what it *really* means is that you've constructed a story about yourself. About who you are. And you've also constructed a story about what a system is. When you put those two stories together, they don't seem to fit.

But the fact that you're here right now watching this video and learning also means something. It means that you understand that your belief about "not being a systems person" might not be totally accurate.

If you were certain it was, you wouldn't be here.

It also means that, even though you say you're not a systems person, you see the value in becoming one. There's something attractive there.

So what's at the base of these stories? How did you create them and how did you decide that you weren't a match?

I like to illustrate this with a story from my own family.

Early in our marriage, my wife, Jess, started having trouble sleeping. She'd landed a new job—one she loved—but it came with a lot of responsibility. We'd also recently bought our home, and it needed some work to make it comfortable.

Between those two things, she was always busy and something important was always on her mind.

And that's when the sleep problems started. There was no way to go to bed without the stress of the busy day following her, and bedtime kept getting later and later until it was affecting her ability to wake up in the morning.

Now, I've dealt with those same stresses before, and you probably have to. These are normal experiences for busy people.

When I asked what she wanted to do to fix it, it was her own idea to create a bedtime routine. She wanted a stable routine that she could follow every night that would get her ready for a good night's sleep.

But, she was really hesitant to actually *create* that routine.

I asked her why, and what I learned was that she knew that a routine would help her, but she had an aversion to creating one because she thought of it like building a prison for herself. Once a routine was "telling her what to do," it made her want to rebel and not follow it.

We talked some more, and what I learned is that Jess had a story about systems that goes like this:

Systems are boring. They're monotonous and they kill your creativity. Routines make you brainless. You just do the same thing over and over without thinking about it. There's no variety.

And systems are rigid. They don't work because life is fluid and dynamic. When you try to build a system, it never works very long because something always comes along to mess it up.

And that story didn't mesh with the picture of who she is—which is a thoughtful and creative person who values variety and change.

So, think about what your stories are. What is your story of what a system is? And what's the story of who you are? You need to figure out where the conflicts are.

Now, where did those stories come from?

When we talked a little more, I learned that Jess's definition of what a system or a routine is came from some negative experiences with them in the past.

And I think those experiences are extremely common. I've had all of them myself.

You know, for most of our lives, we really *are* prisoners of monotonous systems. Growing up, your parents give you all kinds of rules to follow that you often don't agree with. You go to school, and you're inserted into a system designed to educate an "average" student. If you fall outside of the school's definition of average, that system can be maddening.

Then you get a job, and the business is filled with systems to operate and routines to follow that you didn't create. Every day, you're forced to follow them in order to keep your job even though you can see all the ways they actually hold you back from doing better work.

So, for most of our lives, we're inserted into systems and routines that other people have built for us.

It's no wonder that kind of control would make you want to rebel. It's no wonder it would make you feel oppressed and uncreative. And it's even more frustrating that, as an outsider, you can see everything that's wrong with those systems, but you're powerless to do much about them.

Is that your story? Does it sound familiar? Take a minute to think about the systems you're part of today and the routines you follow at work or at school. Could they have played a role in shaping that story for you? What other bits of your experience with system and routine could be shaping your story?

Even I have felt this way in the past. When I first started my business, I had no purposefully built systems or routines at all. And because I was working in a highly creative field, I was scared to try to build them. I didn't want to give up my creativity just to get some time back. I was worried that wasn't a good trade.

And it really held me back from growing and getting my life under control. But I did figure it out, and there were some really important lessons along the way. So, here are the four most important ones that I learned.

1. Your life is already ruled by systems and routines.
2. The system is not the boss. You are.
3. Systems and routines make you *more* creative. And
4. Your systems don't need to be perfect.

Let's dive into each of those.

First, your life is already ruled by systems and routines.

We don't need to go too in depth on this one; the last few lessons should have made this pretty clear. Once you realize that your life is already a vast series of systems and routines, you realize that you're actually a systems person by nature. It's built into your genetics.

Of course, if you haven't built your systems on purpose, then they might not work that well. But the good news is now that you know, you can build better ones. Ones that you're actually in control of.

Which brings me to the next point: The system is not the boss. You are.

This is a natural lesson you learn as you start to build your own systems and routines on purpose.

If you grew up following rules and schedules and routines that were handed to you by authoritative figures, then it's very normal to want to avoid those things once you grow up and you have a choice.

For your whole life, you've been a slave to systems that weren't a good fit for you.

But that all changes when you build your own purposeful systems and routines. The fear of being controlled by rules goes away when you realize you were the one who created those rules for yourself.

And because you created those rules, you're free to change or abandon them whenever you like.

When you build your own systems, you're the boss. Your systems and routines exist to serve you. Not the other way around.

Once you understand that, the next lesson is easy to learn. Systems and routines actually make you *more* creative.

This is the result of a really simple equation. More free time, less stress, and more control enables you to be more creative.

Since you're the one in control of your systems and routines now, you're able to build the ones that support whatever creative output you need to produce. Whether you're a painter, a writer, a musician, a graphic designer, whatever. Maybe you just want more creativity in your day to day office work.

Since you're the one creating the routines that work for *you*, you can design the ones that support that. And it might not be a direct connection. You might create systems that reduce busy work so that you have more time to go for walks and think through your creative ideas.

Or you might use them to automate and bring order to some of the work that normally stresses you out. By lowering your stress levels, you're going to create a more calm atmosphere in your mind and your body. And that will make you more motivated to focus on your creative efforts.

So, when I say that systems and routines make you *more* creative, I don't necessarily mean that you need to create a routine that dictates your creative process. Of course, some people do that and find it extremely beneficial. There's something to be said for getting yourself to practice creativity even when you're feeling uncreative.

But what I really mean is that by setting up systems and routines around the work that *doesn't* aid your creativity, you can win back a lot of time and clear away a lot of stress. And that gives you the ability to sit calmly with your thoughts and focus on being creative.

But what if you put in all this effort and your system doesn't work the way you want it to?

What a failure! You wasted all that time. Not so fast!

No, of course it isn't a failure.

When you set out to build a new system or a new routine for yourself, you have a big vision of what it's going to do for you. But big visions are almost never achieved in one try.

Instead, your first attempt produces a little bit of success, but not as much as you'd like. But since it worked, you now have a little bit more time and experience, so you make another attempt and you tweak it.

This is a process that happens over and over again. In fact, you can build a routine to automate system improvement. And we'll even go over that later in the course!

If you are completely without any grounding and productive systems in your life, think of it as if you were homeless with nowhere to go. Then, suddenly, as if by magic, you have the materials and the tools to build a house.

When you're done, would you care that the roof leaks or that the windows aren't properly sealed? No, you wouldn't! Or at least, you wouldn't mind much in comparison to what you just accomplished, which is a sturdy foundation to build on top of. You're now in a much better place, even though that place isn't perfect.

And you have the experience and practice now to go back and fix the roof and the windows when you're ready.

It's the same with system building. When you don't have one, anything you create is better than nothing, even if it sucks! Because, when you're done, you have something better than what you did, and you can improve it whenever you want.

This is what I want you to understand and internalize if you're someone who has told yourself in the past that you're just not a systems person or that routines aren't for you.

So here's what we just learned:

First, we learned that your life is already dictated by systems and routines even if you didn't create them on purpose. So, you really *are* a systems person.

Then, we learned that when you create your own systems, you're the one in charge. You don't have to feel like a slave to your routines.

Next, we learned that building systems and routines can actually support the creative process and make you a *more* creative person.

Finally, we learned that it's totally okay to get started with imperfect systems. A system that sucks is better than no system at all because a system that sucks can be improved until it's great.

Let that sink into your mind for a little bit today, and I'll see you in the next lesson.