

Hello and welcome!

In our last video, we defined some basic vocabulary so that we’re on the same page when we talk about systems and routines.

In this lesson, you’re going to learn how to “think” in systems.

This is an important foundational piece because building systems that save you time and reduce stress requires that you become attuned to the systems and routines that already surround you in your everyday life.

When you start see them—and they really are everywhere—it’s like adding another dimension to your consciousness. You start to see the world around you in a way you hadn’t noticed before.

Today’s lesson will help you start to unlock that dimension so that, later on, you can begin using it to craft better systems and routines for yourself.

I know that you already know that building strong systems and routines that produce repeatable results is a valuable goal to strive for.

So the question becomes, why doesn’t everyone just default to this? Why do so many people live their lives in chaos? Like every day is a war zone that they’re trying to escape?

We all know the alternative is better, but so few people spend any time or energy creating the systems that will get them there. Why is that?

There are two primary reasons for this.

First, consciously building systems and routines to work the way you want them to and improve your life... is hard. Even though the benefit of putting in the work can pay off in really big ways, it doesn’t change the fact that getting started can be difficult.

Second, we tend to take great systems for granted. We don’t even notice them. In day to day life, we only think about systems when they’re poorly designed or broken.

To prove my point, let’s see if you notice the dozens of systems around you *right now*. Can you find them?

If you’re at work and inside right now, the building you’re in a series of systems that are keeping you comfortable. There’s an HVAC system circulating air to keep the

temperature stable. If it's a big building, there's probably a maintenance crew operating their own systems and routines to keep the place clean and working properly. A fridge in the break room is keeping your lunch cold. The computer or phone you're using to watch this video right now is a powerful system in a tiny box that makes it possible for you to learn new things from wherever you are.

If all those systems are working the way they're supposed to, you don't notice them.

You don't notice how reliable your car is at getting you everywhere you need to go until it breaks down and you have to live without it for a few days.

You don't notice how useful the maintenance staff at work is until they all go on vacation for a week and the office starts falling apart.

And you completely forget about the fact that your paycheck shows up on time and in the right amount every week until, one week, it doesn't

That's the beauty of a great system. It's transparent. But it's also the problem that keeps so many people from building useful systems and routines for themselves.

Most of the time you spend thinking about systems is spent thinking about them when they go wrong. When they go right, they're invisible, so you don't build up positive thoughts about them.

Combine that with the fact that building a system can be a lot of work up front when you're already feeling too busy, and it's easy to see why it's easy to ignore.

What we need to do to fix that is reset the way your brain interacts with systems so that you're able to recognize all the ways they improve your life. We need to make them more visible so that you don't only notice them when something goes wrong.

Here's an exercise you can do right now to help with that.

First, take a moment to look around the room or whatever environment you're in right now. Try to make a mental note of all the things that either you're interacting with or have some sort of influence over what you're doing right now.

Some of these things might be your computer or phone. The desk you're at. The chair you're sitting in. The clothes you're wearing. The pen and notebook you're using to take notes. The building that you're in.

Now, get a little more abstract and think about the things that allowed you to get to where you are right now, watching this video.

There's an endless list that you could create depending on how granular you want to get, so just try to think of the bigger pieces.

Your car might have driven you to where you are. The street system, or maybe a public transit system, allowed you to get there. If you're at work, many different people have come together to create a business system that you're part of. There's a building to house them all, and you're inside of it.

There's an accounting system that ensures you're paid for your work, and that you're paid on time. What about your spouse or significant other if you have one? What things do they consistently do that enables you to be right here, right now.

Here are my answers to these questions so you can see how I work through it.

Right now, I'm standing in front of a camera in a small video production studio I've built. There are multiple pieces of equipment around me that have made this video possible. There's a camera on a tripod. There's a teleprompter reminding me what to say so that I don't go off on too many tangents. Several lights are illuminating my face. A microphone and preamplifier are capturing everything I say, and what seems like 100 miles of various cables is sending all the different signals around to the right places.

All in all, about 20 different companies all with their own systems came together to make it possible for me to stand here and talk to you.

Yesterday, the camera malfunctioned and I lost a piece of video I'd just recorded. That was a really frustrating moment, but I only needed to look around at all this equipment and everything I'm able to do with it to remind myself that I'd taken for granted that, 99.9% of the time, everything works perfectly and it makes my life a lot easier.

Tonight, I'll sit down to have dinner with my wife, and everything will be ready as if by magic. She has her own shopping and cooking system that ensures I eat well every day. Thanks to that, I almost never think about food. And that means I have more time and space to focus on other things that are important to me. Like making this video lesson.

There are many other systems operating in the background that make it possible for me to be here right now. And many more that I'm forgetting because they work so well I never see them fail.

Every single day, we benefit from systems that other people have built for us. If you don't notice them, it's probably because they work really well!

So, in order to “think in systems” and get your brain primed for that kind of thinking, you have to teach it new ways to see what it normally doesn't see.

Taking a moment each day to actively look for the systems that surround you is the best way to get teach yourself to see what is normally invisible.

So take a moment to complete the exercise I outlined above, and make a note of what you found.

And the next time you find yourself frustrated because something that normally works stopped working, remind yourself that the reason you're frustrated is probably because it works so well all the rest of the time.

If you do this a few times, you might find a new appreciation for things you normally take for granted.

In our next lesson, you'll take this a step further by applying it to your own invisible systems and routines.