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## » Dear Sage...

### Dear Sage:

As an entrepreneur, I'm very focused on results, yet I know that too narrow a focus can be dangerous to my longer-term success. Is there a way I can **open up my focus** a bit without compromising what I need to do this quarter?

### Dear Entrepreneur:

Just as scientists select various configurations of lenses - microscopes, telescopes, or perhaps reading glasses or even the naked eye - to address different problems, you may want to select business "lenses" to match your various challenges, perhaps even viewing some problems multiple ways to see which gives you the most help.

There are a number of business lenses that all fit under the umbrella term "**systems thinking**." Perhaps one of these might help:

If you're faced with long delays between action and result (you're developing a product today, and you expect to see revenue in a year or more), if your challenges involve feedback (you take action, the competition responds, and then you respond again, all in a never-ending loop), or if you'd like to test a number of strategies before implementation using computer simulation, then system dynamics may be of use.

If you're at the "fuzzy front end" of creating strategy, then the rather new **QPID (Qualitative Politicized Influence Diagrams)** might be just the thing.

If you are trying to "make something happen" by pushing the envelope, perhaps ideas from complex adaptive systems would be helpful.

If your view of the situation differs strongly from what your employees see, and you worry that your customers, investors, suppliers, and, yes, even competitors see still different views and you feel you need to understand them, soft systems methodology might be the simplifying lens to help you unify all these views.

How can you begin? Perhaps start a low-level development program in your company to educate folks on the basics of a few systems thinking approaches. That way, when faced with tough challenges (and what entrepreneur isn't?), you'll have a common set of tools and a common vocabulary for working through them. If you do decide you need to bring in outside help from time to time, you'll be a more educated consumer of the advice you're

getting.

The process can be simple: start a book club to encourage people to read and comment on books on the topic, or bring in speakers or workshops to provide new ideas. When you're facing a real challenge, use what you've learned, or bring in outside help to cover the stuff you aren't ready to do on your own yet.

Here are some additional resources if you want to explore further:

- Read a short introduction to [system dynamics](#) (PDF), and more under [Systems Thinking](#).
- [See an example](#) (PDF) of how QPID was used in a healthcare setting.
- Glenda Eoyang's book ***Coping With Chaos: Seven Simple Tools*** describes one model for applying the ideas of complex adaptive systems to real-world situations.
- Read a [comprehensive overview of soft systems methodology](#), and very readable [introduction](#) (select Free Resources, and then scroll down to Soft Systems Methodology under Systems Stuff).

Sincerely,  
[Bill Harris](#)  
Facilitated Systems  
***for the Sage***  
March 2005

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