The first step in systems thinking is to understand that everything is part of a system in some way. The human body is a system, our homes are a system, the communities in which we live are systems, our jobs are systems, and all of these systems are part of larger systems connecting everything on earth.

A leader can use systems thinking to understand their organization's inner workings and its place in a larger system. Seeing these connections and taking into account all parts of the organization's system can help a leader understand the flow of their organization and predict the effects of a change outside its immediate area. Systems thinking gives the leader the ability to step back and have a broader perspective on their organization and the decisions they make. Seeing the broader system helps a leader understand how they are affected by outside issues, and how their group's internal issues affect the outside world.

A system map is a thinking tool that can be used to visualize and explore the parts and interactions within a system. It includes boundaries to show the system of interest and sub-systems within it. System maps show the structure of a system as a hierarchy of groupings. Leaders can use system maps to explore connections and find different ways of looking at a problem to find the most innovative and successful solution. Being able to visualize the reach of their system and seeing how different parts are related and affect one another and help a leader understand how the future may unfold if a certain decision or change is made.