



# The Soil of Leadership

By Dr. Britt Yamamoto • Amplify Publishing 2024

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## The Nutshell

### INTRODUCTION

We seek greater connection to ourselves, our communities, our work, and our place in the world, yet these very same contexts are usually rife with disconnections—forces that drive us away and push us apart. In these pages I share with you some of the most significant leadership lessons I absorbed while learning to be a sustainable farmer and organizational leader.

### CHAPTER 1: THE TRIP FROM DIRT TO SOIL

In plant-based propositions, leaders are trying to get output from the things they see. How to increase performance. How to improve metrics. But soil-based inquiries offer more depth and meaning—such as how to build trust and connection between people—but are discounted as “soft,” with little awareness of the kind of commitment and resources necessary to achieve them.

## CHAPTER 2: SOIL BUILDING

Time is knowing when to plant, thin, stake, prune, harvest, cover crop, and rest. Space is leaving sufficient distance between plants, keeping competitors in their own corner of the garden, and marking off paths. Relationships are the dynamics between soil microorganisms and creatures, between species of companion plants, the ways in which plants attract insects, and the interplay between the plants you cultivate intentionally and the ones that volunteer a bit too eagerly.

## CHAPTER 3: INQUIRY

Inquiry lives at the very heart of the Soil of Leadership, and it is not only a state of being but an open passage to discovery that all leaders need to be able to access if they wish to cultivate a deeper connection to themselves, to others, and their work. So often in our work, in our leadership, or even just more generally in our lives, we are living in a world of reaction.

## CHAPTER 4: REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

There is a saying, “We lead from who we are.” But in the context of the Soil of Leadership we might say “We lead from who we are and where we are rooted.” Or, even better, “Our fruits are only as strong as our roots.” Reflective Practice helps us discover a greater connection to both roots and fruits—the very essence of who we are and where we are rooted.

## CHAPTER 5: FALLOW

Over time, repeated extraction depletes whatever nutrients may have been present in the earth to the point of scarcity, and dependencies rise as the cycle of production accelerates and compresses to meet the demands

of precarious consumption: plant, manage, harvest, and repeat. Growing soil, on the other hand, situates production in a larger context, understanding that there should be no extraction without restoration. We push and challenge the ground to provide, but never lose sight of the truth that healthy plants thrive in healthy soil.

## CHAPTER 6: SPACIOUSNESS

To ensure that myriad relationships thrive, a farmer must mind the spaces in between: newly planted seeds and seedlings, fresh furrows and rows, layers of organic waste on the compost pile, even between microorganisms in the soil. Above ground, not enough space chokes off full potential; too much compromises production goals. Below the surface, the success of root systems and the very survival of microorganisms relies upon thoughtful spacing.

## CHAPTER 7: ROOTS

A plant becomes root-bound when its root systems run out of space. This occurs when a plant is grown in a container (not in open soil) and its root become a gnarled, dense mass that allows too little space to grow and so the plant’s growth is stunted. To water a plant does not mean to literally water the plant. Watering the soil means tending to the conditions under which plant roots can and will absorb moisture. It means thinking about how the patterns and strategies of watering can shape plant health and resilience. The practice of deep watering results in greater resilience by focusing on the depth of roots.

## CHAPTER 8: WELL-BEING

If you’re wilting on the surface, your soil dried out long ago. It is, therefore, long past time to regenerate your taproot by building a practice of deep watering—a

practice of well-being. Ongoing well-being requires attention to both your relationship to others and to the world around you.

## CHAPTER 9: AWARENESS

The soil-building approach to leadership is fundamentally about expanding your awareness. While it is true that leadership is inherently external facing, it is performed and expressed with an emphasis on “how to be” and “what to do.” Effective leadership is not possible without attention to the internal core, the taproot of leadership: who you are.

## CHAPTER 10: WORKING TOGETHER

Collaboration at its most basic begins with exchanging resources, trading skills, or pooling efforts in the interest of a common purpose. There is a shared purpose and shared outcomes. The integration of hearts—the unifying of the separate pieces to create a greater sense of wholeness—this is the realm of love. To be and remain in this space—especially in organization and group life—is rare and often fleeting.

## CHAPTER 11: COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY

Individual reflection is good, but collaborative inquiry is even more effective in exposing our misguided assumptions and gaps in awareness. We all struggle to have conversations that help participants feel seen and heard and that result in generative outcomes. In my organization we have prioritized “soil building conversations” that are journeys of discovery through uncertainty to find clarity and resourcefulness.

## CONCLUSION

Leadership is complicated, hard, messy work that can become transformational for both you and the people you work with when you are more deeply rooted in purpose, fed by well-being, and connected to what matters. It is the hidden and inner world, outside of the view of many, that shapes our presentation in leadership. The deeper the roots, the stronger the shoots.