



“The Soil is Loyal. Once You Build it, It Keeps Producing.”

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Brandi Mack is an inspired nature-positive leader who brings to light the power of learning from nature's wisdom to create conditions conducive to life. Brandi is a holistic health educator, therapeutic massage therapist, birth consultant and maternal health advocate, master gardener and permaculture designer, speaker, facilitator, and more. We sat down with Brandi to learn about the common threads that tie her work together, as well as the impacts of working with nature as a mentor to build systems which support thriving communities. Brandi is also one of the incredible co-facilitators of the Living Systems Leadership Retreat, and she shares the perspective she brings to this role and the retreat experience.

Q: The first condition for being a nature-positive leader is having a relationship with nature that allows us to receive the knowledge it has to offer. How do you connect with nature?

A: Absolutely. Nature is the teacher of all teachers, and her wisdom is tried and true. To me, learning from nature starts with connecting with ourselves. We are from nature; we are nature. Our internal systems are organized according to life's principles, and there's so much to be learned from sitting with and observing our own patterns. We can acknowledge how our life moves in seasons, what the necessary conditions are for us to thrive, and the processes by which we can regenerate ourselves.

Once we see ourselves as nature, we can expand outwards and recognize how connected we are to the Earth in all we do. Do you know who grows your food? If not, can you find a way to meet them? Are you conscious of the time, resources, and energy required to sustain you, and the teamwork that turns these things into the food you eat and the shelter you live in? On top of all of this, spending time in your local ecosystem allows you to observe the ways that other species behave and shed light on nature's wisdom too. Being present and tapping into the knowledge that flows within and around you is an invaluable learning experience.

Q: Expanding upon that, you set a wonderful example of integrating nature's wisdom into all you. How does that process work for you?

A: In my work specifically, I look to Mother Nature for lessons about healing. Our planet has seen so many different events that have caused destruction on minor and massive scales, and life always perseveres. The first step in making way for life to thrive again after disruption is to rebuild the soil. When the soil is rich, the whole ecosystem thrives. This lesson applies to everything I do, especially when I work with communities that have been affected by colonization, racism, sexism, and other major destructive forces in our human ecosystem. We have to rebuild the soil.



Q: Can you elaborate on the idea of rebuilding the soil, in the context of both nature and the human-made world?

A: I often say “I stand on the shoulders of my ancestors.” When I think about the time pre-enslavement, during which my ancestors lived in such close contact with the Earth, I think about how they thrived. During enslavement, one of the biggest things we lost was our relationship to the land. I know that rebuilding my own relationship with the Earth is my path to healing. I can be nurtured by the land and nurture it in return, and through this process I learn about myself through and how I exist in the context of all that has come before me. Rebuilding my own soil has consisted of learning how to live with the land and tend it in a way that is regenerative for us both. Doing so has allowed me to plant deep roots in community and grow the branches of my work in so many different directions. My goal now is to make sure that everyone I’m connected to gets a harvest, and can also be a healer. To do that, we need to look at our work and its impacts holistically, and look to nature to answer our big questions. So, when I set a goal to build new social ecosystems in communities where a shared foundation has been shaken, it’s a bottom-up process based on nature’s answer to the question “how do we rebuild soil?” I find that what we need most are partnerships, protection, cooling periods, and fertilizers.



Q: Can you explain how you translate these elements into a framework for community organizing and solution building?

A: Yes!

1. Let’s start with partnerships. One of the most important factors that determines soil fertility is the presence of healthy mycelial networks, and that’s true for our systems too. I’m always thinking about what people need to come together and form similar mutualisms. We need the time and physical spaces that allow us to build relationships, and initiatives that ignite networks of communication and cooperation. We also need to be intentional about who we’re already including in our work, and who else we need to collaborate with. Nature optimizes diversity, and no community is complete without a range of voices, perspectives, and backgrounds coming together to build sustainable solutions to shared challenges.
2. In thinking about protection, I like to think of cover crops and a no-till practice. When we connect with each other in a way that is extractive, our resource systems become drained and individuals are harmed. How can we build in mechanisms that make sure that we’re putting back into the soil– our shared foundation– as much as we’re getting from it. How do we make sure that we’re not continually exploiting vulnerabilities as so often happens in human ecosystems, and are building systems that anchor those who are at risk of being overlooked and swept away when disturbances occur into the rich and fertile soil so it can remain that way?
3. Now, cooling periods. We can think about our life in seasons. As time passes, we experience cycles of growth, of rest, and of resetting. How can we build in rest and

restoration for all the members of our teams and communities?

4. Finally, fertilizer. Soil isn't productive without it, and the relationships which help us build regenerative systems need fertilizer too. In my work, this often means that I'm focused on community building and on *relationship as task*: the idea that growing towards one another is a necessary part of any project. I help to create spaces where people can share resources and meet each other's needs, as well as engage in joyful connection, to fertilize the soil that our collaboration is built upon.

When we use nature's most foundational living resource and all of its needs as a reference for our own living foundation, we can build systems that help every member of our community thrive, and we can bring to life our commitment to a mutually beneficial exchange between ourselves and the Earth that feeds us and teaches us.



Q: You're a co-facilitator of the Living Systems Leadership Retreat. How do you bring your perspective to the retreat experience and what does it mean to attend an event like this one?

A: Another phrase I love: "We go fast alone, and far together." All around me, I'm watching the world organize itself in a more collective way, and it brings me so much joy. As we work to be more regenerative beings and communities, we have to remind ourselves and each other of our connection with nature.

One of the big problems preventing large-scale solutions to the climate crisis is the consistency of miscommunications. What do we really mean when we talk about a climate crisis? What time scales are we looking at? What will the consequences of inaction be? We don't necessarily all have the same words to address this big of an issue in a way that can lead to a united front. But nature's language is one we can all understand, because we are nature. It's so important to create spaces where people can come together and learn how to hear what nature has to say. LSL is one of these spaces. It's also a place where people can enrich their own soil by rediscovering their connection to the Earth, can expand their roots by learning about the strengths that come with their own unique form of leadership, and can connect with the ecosystem at large by building meaningful relationships with other women who are ready to be partners in this work.

Q: As we celebrate Earth Day, what else is coming up for you around Nature-Positive leadership?

A: Mother Earth will always do what it's going to do. This planet will continue on, and it's up to us to decide whether we are willing to learn the lessons nature wants to teach us the healing way or the hard way. Are we willing to adapt to evolve? To pay attention to feedback loops and change the direction of our extraction? To root into community and build a new way of being, together? We have been removed from nature and put into boxes, and now is the time to re-wild ourselves. Nature is a co-laboratory. We're facing a huge climate challenge, but there is so much to learn in response to this challenge if we're willing to do it in partnership with Earth.

We are so grateful to Brandi for the example she sets and for all of her wonderful work. To support her, you can donate to [Camp Butterfly's 20th Reunion](#), and you can hire her for consulting work at [BrandiMack.com](#).

