



CHAPTER ONE

SHI Core Practices

The principles and practices that guide how SHI creates the conditions for deep listening, authentic relationships, and transformative action throughout the herbal value network.

"The secret is not how you manage the land or the technology you use. The secret is the heart with which you manage it."

LYLA JUNE JOHNSON • EXPOWEST, 2024

"It would be sick and twisted if in harvesting the medicines from this region and selling them to others, this community isn't healed."

LORI BRISCOE • APPALACHIAN TEA AND BOTANICALS



SHI began by asking what is needed to do business in a way that truly honors people, plants, and place so that life is supported from the source to the finished product?

We have found that the answer begins in the attention and intention brought to one-on-one relationships. The questions then become:

- What does it take to develop and nurture relationships based on respect and partnership rather than extraction and exploitation?
- What are the conditions needed to develop and nurture these non-transactional relationships in global trade?
- What is needed to create and sustain those conditions?

This toolkit offers concrete tools, templates, and best practices to demonstrate how to apply these values on the ground. Yet, as Lyla Johnson says in the opening quotation, the secret is not in the tools themselves but in the heart with which you manage those tools.

The SHI virtual Learning Labs and in-person Learning Journeys are where we create the conditions that allow participants to show up with their whole selves which in turn allows us to lead with our hearts. Below are the key principles and practices that guide this work. The work doesn't end here, but this is where it begins.

Awe and Gratitude

Begin from a place of awe, gratitude, and respect. Spend solo time to connect with the place where we are (in-person gatherings). Find our own way to introduce ourselves to that place and share our intention. Spend solo time with plants, finding our way to introduce ourselves to the plant and communicate in a way that feels authentic to us.



Intention

In an opening circle, each participant shares their intention. This creates a container for our time together that is built from shared engagement and participation.

Connecting to Place and Past

Whenever we gather for in-person gatherings, we have someone from the area or who knows the area introduce this place to us, the history of the land and the history of the people who lived on this land. This helps us understand and respect: Who lived here? What happened? What did they know? Where are they now? And allows us to move through that landscape with respect for the past.

Connecting to the Plants

SHI members are herbal product companies that are rooted in the vision and values of plant based medicine. These systems of healing arise from a deep sense of respect for and awareness of being in relationship to the aliveness of the world. We keep these values at the center of our work. Some practices for doing this include:

- Begin monthly meetings by connecting with the plants in some way. This can be through guided visualizations, a moment of silence, or whatever you feel connects you in this way.
- At in-person gatherings, spend time one on one with plants, intentionally connecting with the whole plant and bringing in the aliveness and spirit of that plant, seeing the plants as living entities first, not as raw material or product.

Listening

"Changing the way we listen sounds like a small thing. But when you change how you listen, you change the quality of your relationships, the quality of your experience, and the quality of the experiences of those around you. And when you change those things, you change, well, everything."

OTTO SCHARMER • PRESENCING, 2025

Listening is central to SHI's approach. What arises in each of us and in our work together from listening deeply to the people, plants, and places we visit, to each other, and to ourselves? In addition to listening to the plants and the places where we are, this means listening to voices of all stakeholders involved, especially those not often heard or not allowed to speak in global trade. Below are some guidelines.

PRACTICES

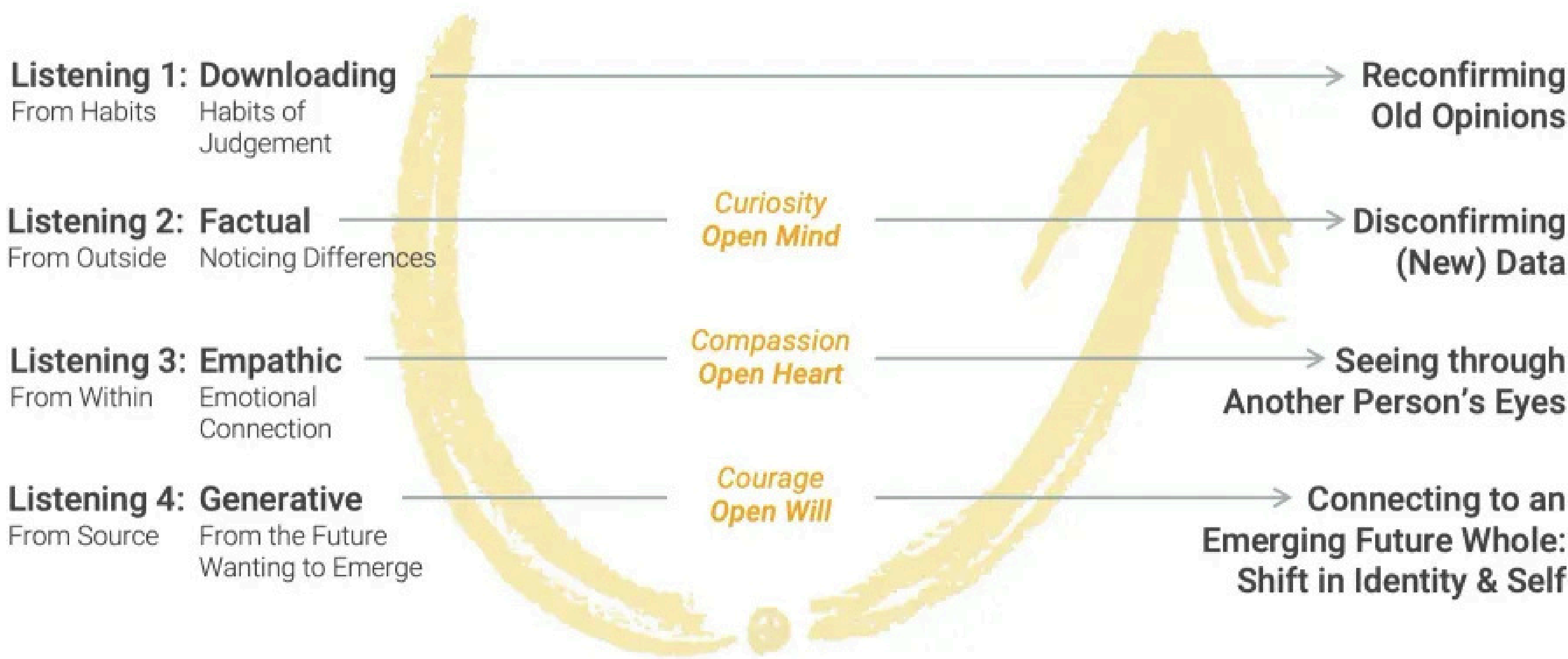
Listening — Become aware of the 4 levels of listening and how they operate in your interactions and work. Pay attention to how you listen. Are you listening to speak? To understand? To empathize? To listen to a future that is trying to emerge?

Dialogue Walk — Go on a 20 minute walk with someone in your company whom you don't know or don't know well. Each share for 10 minutes while the other listens. The other person can ask clarifying questions but your role is primarily to listen. Topics can be: speak about 2 or 3 life events or people that most inform who you are now and why you are doing what you do. Or share 2 or 3 events or people in the last 5 years who most inform what you are doing and why it matters to you.

Stakeholder Interviews — Seek out the voices and perspectives of those in your company or the industry with whom you don't often interact, those who are not often included in the circle, or those who don't always speak up in group meetings.

At in-person and virtual gatherings, try to bring in different stakeholders and ensure there is room/space for them to share their perspectives.

Four Levels of Listening



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Farmer and Wildharvester Visits

Unlike supplier visits where a company is visiting to see whether a supplier meets their quality standards, the intention of these visits is to experience and understand the perspectives and challenges of the farmers or wildharvesters. It matters how these visits are set up to ensure that that outcome is accomplished.

On the SHI Nicaraguan Learning Journey, groups of four or five individuals visited a farmer and their family. After introductions, we did a small work project that was helpful for that family. On another farmer visit, we prepared lunch and then ate with the family. We brought products to share as gifts. Conversations about farming arose but those weren't the focus of why we were there nor did they guide our questions and conversation. As Matt Richards, Organic Herb Trading, said, it was very different to visit farmers to connect with them rather than see if they were compliant.

Embodied

Have in-person gatherings in locations where it is easy to be outside and then be outside as much as possible. Include some type of physical work that both helps experience physically the work of those we are visiting and gets everyone out of their heads and into their bodies.



Dinner at Oshala Farm, SHI Oregon Learning Journey 2025

Reflection

It can be challenging to listen to ourselves, especially in the busyness and structure of sourcing herbs or leading sustainability departments. Pausing to reflect, by journaling on a key question or on a guided visualization can help us listen to our own voice, remember our own values, and enter our work from a more centered and grounded place.

After field visits, gather in a circle to reflect on the experience. Invite a simple prompt like asking what is alive in people or what surprised them or to just share how they are feeling. This can be hard to make the time for. People may be tired, you may be behind schedule, or any number of reasons why it seems easy to skip. Don't. These conversations always reveal interesting insights. They also deepen listening skills and relationships among everyone overall.

"These conversations always reveal interesting insights. They also deepen listening skills and relationships among everyone overall."

Ann Armbrecht, SHI Founder and Director

Relationships

Create opportunities to connect as whole people. When there are long drives (anything over 30 minutes), create groups that change for each segment of the drive and prompt the groups with questions to reflect on. Make sure each person has some time to share before moving on or opening the conversation.

Note: We spend a fair amount of time creating these groups and making sure people rotate. This makes a difference in the overall quality of group interaction. These conversations create points of connection between people which helps prevent cliques from forming.

Taking Action

We are here to change the system and so taking action is key. Our goal is to take that action from a deeper, more centered place, where we listen to the voices of those in the system, to the land, to the plants, to ourselves, and where we try to understand the system. We identify small actions to take to begin. And then we take them.

Systems Awareness

We are working to bring about systemic shifts. Doing that requires understanding that system: Who are the stakeholders? What are their values? What is at stake for them? What other forces are present in the system? What are the blinders? What are the levers of change?

We practice this through 3D mapping practices used by Theory U and the Presencing Institute. [This Presencing Institute guide](#) outlines the process.

Courage

This work can take courage. Ask: If I had 25% more courage, what would I do? And then begin doing it.

Have Fun!

We laugh, a lot. And we care for each other deeply. This care and connection builds as new participants join. Helping them feel welcome is key!

The tools that underlie our approach can be brought to any type of company, at any size.