To whom it may concern:

I am writing today to recommend Julie Colbrese for the CTI Co-Active Leadership Program. I am a former colleague and partner of Julie’s, but more importantly I am a long-time admirer and pupil. Thus, like many of the people Julie has mentored over the years, I have come to marvel at her curiosity, her willingness to share, and her uncommon sense of empathy…all traits that I attribute to the very best leaders I have met over the years.

As I understand it, you are most interested in how Julie’s leadership might be impacting the world. I’d rather tell you how she has impacted mine. Julie has always had a global perspective on things, even before the Internet made it easy for all of us to. From the day I met her, she has encouraged, enabled and expected me to look outward. And her life-long learning and non-stop networking spirit has always inspired me to spread my wings and continue move outside of my comfort zone.

From the day Julie joined the agency that we would come to own together, she challenged the status quo. She led account, planning, creative and production people out of their silos and into a collaborative state-of-being. She single-handedly created a kids’ marketing specialty…a specialty that led to the establishment of our own licensing and sponsorship department. She championed the establishment of information-sharing portals for internal staff before there were intranets. She spoke at kid conferences, courted kid experts and wrote articles for industry publications. And in the end, she enabled our small agency to win and grow an array of national, multi-million dollar kid clients like Hasbro, Kraft, Kellogg’s, Campbell’s Soup, and Nintendo.

After we sold our agency in 1999, it was Julie who led the efforts to better integrate our creative resources with those of compatible network, sister agencies across the country, and across the globe. She helped to establish best practices and shared briefs. She led the branding effort for the combined entity. And she broadened the impact and the portfolios of our creative talent…wherever they may have sat. In the end, she helped turn a 90-person promotion agency in Chicago into the worldwide headquarters for a global, 420 person activation network.

But after all of the professional leadership accolades, it is Julie’s personal leadership accomplishments that inspire me the most. How she led the family household when her husband was struggling through his many bouts with cancer. How she led her children to be wonderful adults and saw that they each attended college. And how she found the time, every time, to continue to lead those who had been under her tutelage, even after she had moved on to other endeavors.

I think the greatest trait for any true leader is personal integrity. And on this front, Julie is my role model. She was brilliant creative lead. She could have worked in our agency, or in an assortment of other agencies, as long as she wanted. She could have made as much money as she chose to demand. But, there came a time when it wasn’t enough. When the size of the group made intimate coaching opportunities impossible. When profit goals challenged cultural imperatives. When entrepreneurial spirit was replaced by stay-the-course.

It was Julie who had the courage to move on. To begin anew. To look outward. To stick to her beliefs. She worked tirelessly to learn a new craft, to find clients who valued her deliverables. And to grow a business of her own. It is not surprising to me that Julie has become a leader of leaders. She knows how to build bridges and break down barriers. She understands when to defer and when to demand. She can be open-minded and close-fisted. More than anything else, she cares. About good people. And about the good things that can happen when you get them all on the same page.

It is said that we are all granted two lives: the life that we learn with, and the life that we live with. Uncommon are those that are able to live these lives simultaneously. It is they that make the most powerful leaders.

Julie is one of these. I hope someday I can be as well.