How Innovation Success Is Fueled By Early-Stage, Broad Networks

Connected Commons

Leadership

Typical Innovation Evolution

Our clients need a rocket to the moon…

…Tomorrow

Cathy

Boss

Critical Decision Point:
Do you do what you are told?

Typical Innovation Evolution

Boss
Referral

Our clients
need a
rocket to the
moon...

Cathy

Have You
Considered?

Boss

Network
Referral

You Should...

Typical Innovation Evolution

Client/Stakeholder

Boss
Referral

Friend
Referral

Our clients
need a
rocket to the
moon…

Surprise
Offer

Cathy

Have You
Considered?

Boss

Network
Referral

Serendipitous
Encounter

Anja was new to the company and her role.

PRODUCE INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

Individual Contributor

Collaborative Practices Promote Innovation in a Demanding Industry

High Technology

- Insisted on attending a global company conference

- Made personal connections over coffee, drinks, dinner

- Met a leader who could help her group move an idea from prototype to execution

"The only reason that we've been able to pull this product off is that I went to that conference."

Serendipity In Action

Maximus was working on a labor-intensive, data-driven project.

- Ran into a former colleague in the hallway; "Have any ideas?"

- The two joined forces; had prototype to pull the data ready in 3 weeks

- An elevator conversation with a VP led to a presentation; two years later, the process has scaled across the company

"The network was the engineering behind the luck."

Creating Serendipity

1 Structure time to make 1 or 2 exploratory contacts a week

2 Be transparent about projects, interests & goals

3 Take varying routes to your office, lunch, coffee and steal 5 minutes of colleagues' time along the way

4 Capitalize on being in the right place

5 Employ networking tools on two fronts: explore recommendations and review old contacts

Principle 1 – WHO: A Broad Network In Early-Stage Problem Solving Wins Over Time
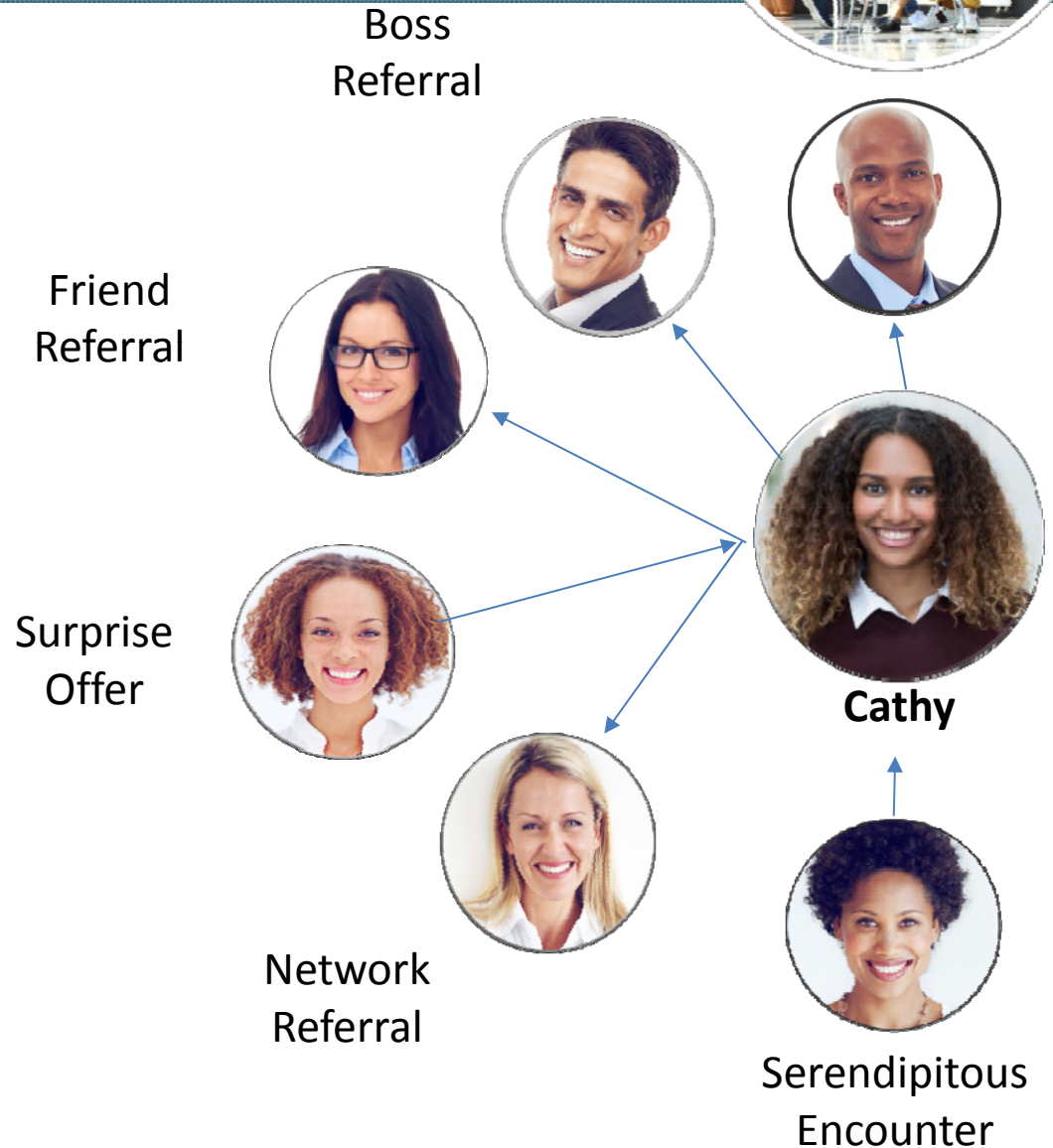
Diverse Views Early on for Idea Development

Iterate with Stakeholders in Prototyping

Tap Network Influencers/ Opinion Leaders

Boss
Referral

Friend
Referral

Surprise
Offer

Cathy

Network
Referral

Serendipitous
Encounter

5 Ways To Get Broad, Non-Insular Networks Involved Early On

1   Hold virtual or in-person sessions to pose a challenge and explore ideas among subject experts and stakeholders.

2   Use personal contacts and information from talent review processes to build core team and expanded team.

3   Ask senior leaders for referrals – they operate in different networks and have awareness and ties you don't have.
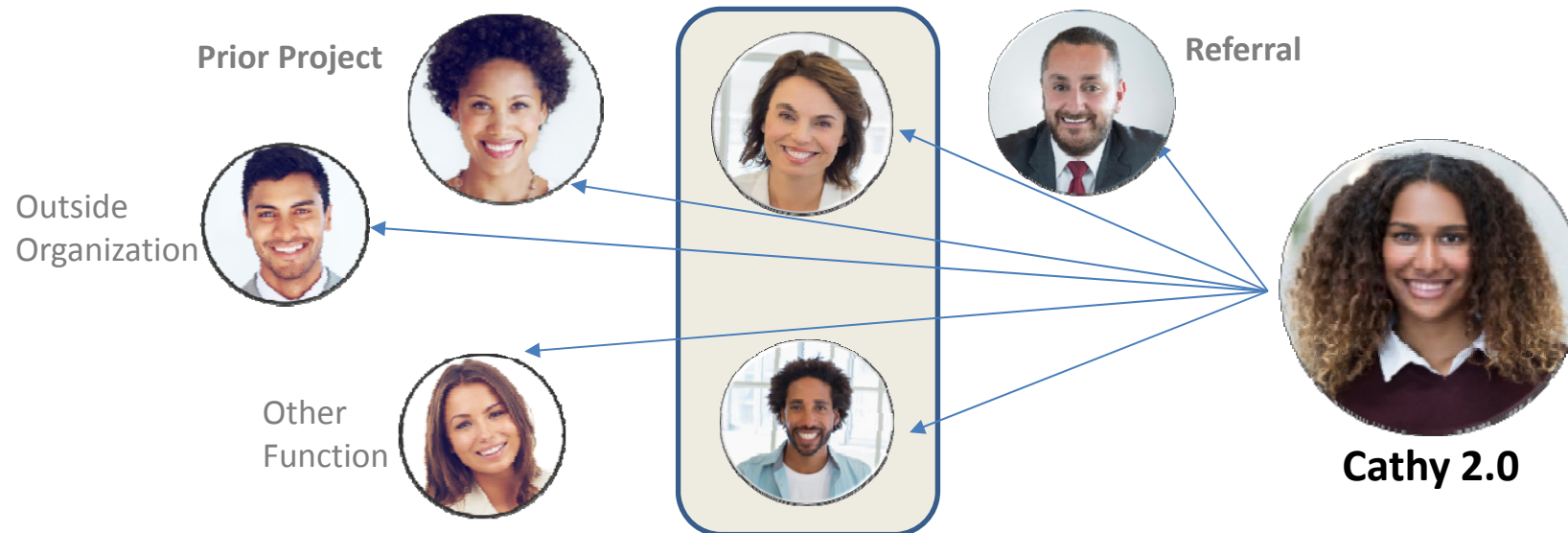
4   Reach into an existing network – a community of practice, a cross-functional team, an interest group.

5   Always ask: Who else should I be speaking with?

Principle 1 – WHO: A Broad Network In Early-Stage Problem Solving Wins Over Time

Cathy 1.0

Prior Project

Referral

Outside Organization

Other Function

Cathy 2.0

Principle 2—HOW:
Interact In Ways That Foster Trust & Openness

Create *pull* (vs. push) early in interactions

Co-create early and often

Energize interactions

Boss Referral

Friend Referral

Surprise Offer

Network Referral

Cathy

Serendipitous Encounter
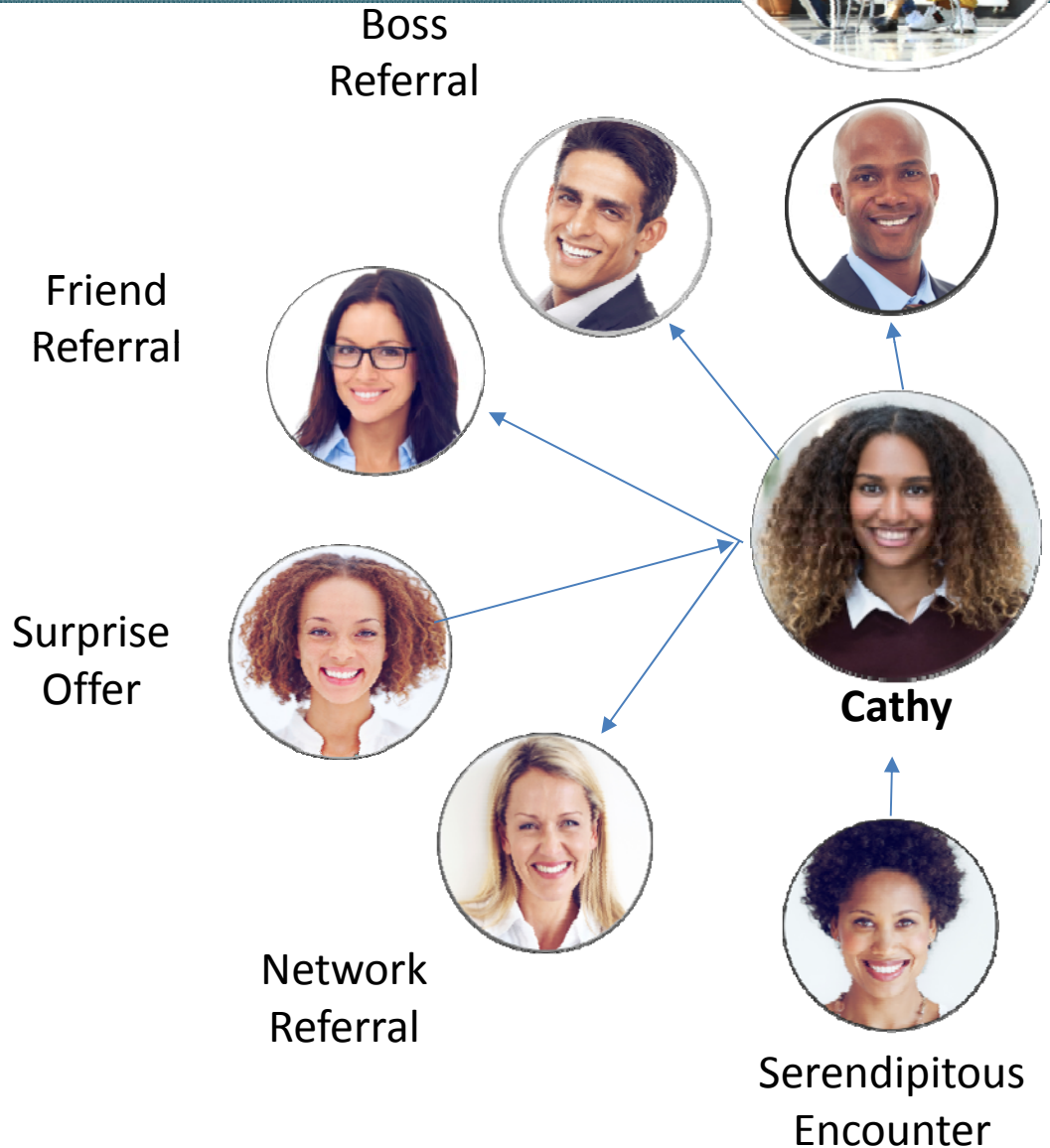
5 Ways To Foster Trust And Openness For Innovation

1 Prime the network to pull you in – be sure people are aware of your expertise and your enthusiasm.

2 Energize people around possibilities through stories and emotion.

3 Foster ownership – help others see how their contributions fit and can be shaped.

4 Talk about the why of the work and helping the group find shared values around the work.

5 Get ideas into play. Test and try. Don't hold back a prototype until perfect.