

In most organizations, these people are Vice Presidents or Executive Directors. They are generally not invited to the top-level meetings, but they are typically told about important decisions before they are rolled out to the rest of the organization.

As you would expect, power and influence decrease with each additional degree of separation away from the CEO.

By the time you get to four or five degrees of separation, you have little to no power or influence over company decisions. You are lucky if the CEO knows your name.

It does not mean you are not important to your organization. You might play a very important role. It simply means that you are not asked to participate in making important company decisions.

CALCULATING YOUR DEGREES OF SEPARATION

The following example is from my first professional job.

Me ⇒ My boss ⇒ Her boss ⇒ His boss ⇒ The President

By counting the arrows, you can see that I was four degrees of separation away from the President.

EXERCISE:

1. Currently, how many degrees of separation are there between you and the top person ?

2. How many degrees of separation were there in your first job?.....
3. How many degrees of separation were there in the job that brought you the most success? The most sanity? Both?.....

During the first half of my corporate career I was promoted several times. I moved from four degrees of separation to two. I was headed in the right direction for me. I changed companies (moved to a smaller pond) to give myself a greater chance of getting ahead. It worked.

I made it to the top executive team. I was one degree of separation away from the CEO of the smaller pond. This was by far my most challenging, exciting, and fulfilling corporate position.

A big part of that was the amazing corporate culture at the time, but another big part was my power and influence within the organization. I enjoyed the responsibility and rewards of being part of a strategic leadership team. I liked being a player in the important meetings. I liked being a part of the team that ran the company.

During the last few years of my corporate career our small pond went through two mergers and acquisitions. I became part of a much bigger pond and I moved from one degree of separation from the CEO to three.

My new position was considered a promotion because I had gone from a Vice President in a \$40 million dollar