



Posted by  
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## Influence is More than Access

*Access and influence are easily confused but far from synonymous. You don't need access to a leader in order to influence him or her, and just because you have access doesn't mean you're influential.*

### WHAT IS INFLUENCE?

Access is tangible—you either interact with someone, or you don't. Influence is intangible, and it comes down to trust and respect.

Influence develops over time, often through shared experiences, difficult seasons, and years of faithful service. A title can get you access from the first day you start a new job, but influence has to be earned.

## NO ACCESS REQUIRED

I started a company called Khidmah in the United Arab Emirates in 2008. In the early days, we could have “company meetings” over lunch, with just five of us sitting around a small table: Saima from Pakistan, Illias from India, Taghrid from Turkey, Abdulla from the UAE, and me. I was the CEO, but since all of the employees reported to me, all of them had full access. Our relationships were informal and direct.



The team that helped create Khidmah in 2009. (from left to right – Taghrid, Adel, Sutton, and Abdulla)

Over the next 14 months, the company grew to 500 employees, and the original four found their spots within the organization. None of them reported directly to me anymore, as they once did. Their direct access was gone, but their influence remained.

Influence is intangible, and it comes down to trust and respect.

Taghrid was my executive assistant, but she had a ton of influence with me. I trusted her because she adopted the early vision of the company, and I respected her because she hung in there through the tough start-up phase, working seven days a week.

Since she had a love for customer service, I sent Taghrid around the world for training. Eventually she started leading our 24/7 call center, overseeing many agents speaking four different languages. Even though she no longer reported to me, I would still walk down the hall to visit the call center and seek her advice from time to time.

## **INFLUENCE IS WHAT'S LEFT AFTER YOU MOVE OUT OF THE BASEMENT**

I've seen a similar scenario play out at Mars Hill Church. For many years, Pastor Tim Smith served alongside Pastor Mark Driscoll as the worship leader.

Not only did they share a stage together each week, Pastor Tim and his wife lived in the Driscoll family basement for a time.

In 2011, however, Mars Hill sent the Smith family to plant a new location in Portland, Oregon. For the first time in over a decade, Pastor Tim's supervisor was no longer Pastor Mark. They now see each other every few months, rather than every few days.

The access that comes with a professional relationship must not be confused with the influence and love that defines a friendship or pastoral relationship.

Even though Pastor Tim's physical access to Pastor Mark was then limited, his influence never changed. They don't share an office. They're far removed on the org chart. But few people within Mars Hill Church had as much influence with Pastor Mark as Pastor Tim because influence is not measured by access, it comes by way of trust and respect.

The access that comes with a professional relationship must not be confused with the influence and love that defines a friendship or pastoral relationship. This is challenging for those of us working in a church, because our boss and our pastor is often the same person. If and when we lose the professional access, it

can feel like our pastor no longer cares about us since we don't see him, talk to him, or meet with him as much. The enemy can use this to cause division and bitterness. But shared history and common mission don't change, and a pastor can still influence you, care for you, and love you as a pastor, even though he's not checking in on you everyday as your boss.

## MORE INFLUENCE = LESS ACCESS

Having been CEO of four companies and executive pastor of two different churches, I've learned that professional access to the senior leader must become more restricted as the organization grows. If it doesn't, both the organization and the senior leader will suffer.

When Pastor Mark was leading a church of 200 as the only employee, access to him was open to all. At that time, however, he was not being invited to write [blog posts for CNN](#) ([http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/09/22/different-takes-should-we-abandon-idea-of-hell/?hpt=hp\\_c1://](http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/09/22/different-takes-should-we-abandon-idea-of-hell/?hpt=hp_c1://)) or sit next to [Barbara Walters on The View](#) ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_JDPjDID904](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_JDPjDID904)), nor was he creating content for sermon campaigns used by hundreds of churches around the world.

All of these new duties were among his responsibilities as pastor of a church of 14,000 in weekly attendance, and in order to meet these expectations, he needed as much margin as possible. He could not supervise a lot

of direct reports, he couldn't advertise open office hours—at least not without compromising his ability to perform his duty to the church.

If a leader's responsibility changes while his accessibility does not, something will break, whether it's the leader, the church, or the leader's family.

We see this in [Acts 2](#) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%202>). The early church consisted of 120 people with Peter as their leader. But on the day of Pentecost, the church grew by 3,000. From this point forward, those original 120 are not mentioned again as a group. The original core scattered and stayed connected via letters and councils, and new leaders arose (like Paul). While the original 120 did not have access to Peter, they had influence. Each shared a common connection of knowing Jesus personally and witnessing firsthand the birth of Christ's church.

If a leader's responsibility changes while his accessibility does not, something will break, whether it's the leader, the church, or the leader's family. A senior leader who oversees a half-dozen direct reports and a dozen more indirect reports with casual access will eventually require a sabbatical. Many will simply quit because they are physically unable to recover or

escape the demands of so many people. Unfettered access to the senior leader will damage if not destroy the organization.

## HIJACKED BY THE GOOD OLD DAYS

When an organization grows and people lose access to the senior leader, many will take the selfish route and leave. They look back on the smaller, familial organization as the golden days, but [Ecclesiastes 7:10 \(NIV\)](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ecclesiastes%207.10) (<http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ecclesiastes%207.10>) reads, "Do not say, 'Why were the old days better than these?' For it is not wise to ask such questions."

A fondness for the former days is often based on a prior level of access to the senior leader and a perceived influence with him. It can be an indication that, for some, status is more important than the organization's health or the senior leader's well-being. What they don't understand, however, is that as the organization grows, each person's influence grows with it. My former company, Khidmah, has now grown to over 1,000 employees, and the call center led by Taghrid has gone from 300 to 3,500 calls per week. It is now one of the largest call centers in Abu Dhabi.

If Taghrid had quit back in 2009 when she lost her access to the CEO, she would have missed out on the influence and the opportunity that a high-growth organization has to offer. She humbly stuck it out, and is now enjoying a successful leadership career.

## A TWO-WAY STREET

The lanes of influence create a two-way street. Trust and respect must be mutual between the leader and the follower in order for influence to exist. A follower cannot influence a leader without his or her respect, and a leader cannot influence a follower without his or her trust (and vice versa).

It is possible to work in close proximity with a person while exerting no influence over them whatsoever. In fact, the greatest test of influence takes place once access disappears. You can lose your access without losing your influence, but if your influence evaporates once your access is gone, you never had any influence to begin with.



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