Step 2 of 5 · Inside the vice-president stack

VP vs SVP

From running one function well to arbitrating between functions. This is the first level where you lead work you have never personally done, and the first where the answer to a good proposal is routinely no because something else matters more.

	Vice President CURRENT LEVEL Owns a whole function or line of business, including its budget, its headcount and its results.	**Senior Vice President** THE STEP UP Carries several functions, a region or a large business unit, and trades them against each other.
Accountable to	An SVP or a chief officer, for the function's results.	An EVP or a chief officer, for the unit's results.
Scope of accountability	One whole function or line of business. Owns the result outright and is named when it misses.	Several functions, a region or a major business unit — frequently with a P&L rather than a budget.
Freedom to act	Sets the plan and the policy for the function, inside a strategy set above. Escalates what crosses into another function.	Shapes the strategy the VPs operate inside, and decides the trade-offs between the units underneath it.
Type of problem	Problems are ambiguous. Chooses between methods and defines what good looks like inside the function.	Decides which systems get invested in and which get starved, on incomplete information.
Breadth of management	Integrates several sub-functions that run on different rhythms and metrics.	Manages heterogeneous functions through leaders whose craft they may never have practiced.
Who must be persuaded	Peer executives, in a live competition for shared money and people.	Competing executives who all have a defensible case — and often the Board, for the first time.
Money authority	Builds the function's budget, defends it, and reallocates inside it.	Moves budget and headcount between functions without asking permission.
Time horizon	The annual plan, plus the capability the function needs next year.	Two to three years, including capability that does not pay back this year.
Legal & governance standing	An officer in title only at most companies. May hold limited signing authority by delegation.	Often a designated officer, with authority to sign commitments binding the unit.

The step up what is genuinely new, not just bigger

1. **Leading beyond your craft**
The first level where your reports know their work better than you do, so judgment replaces expertise as the primary tool.

2. **Trade-off authority**
The SVP can take from one function to give to another. That single power is what the extra band is paying for.

3. **Board and investor exposure**
Presenting up rather than only managing down — and being held to what you said last quarter.

Where it varies by industry and company size

Banking
SVP is senior but not the top rank. Managing Director sits above it, and a bank SVP can be a senior individual contributor with no team.

Healthcare systems
SVP frequently equals a hospital president or region lead — a full P&L role that would carry an EVP title elsewhere.

Under ~1,000 employees
The SVP layer is usually skipped entirely. VPs report straight to the C-suite, so a new SVP band is often title inflation.

PE-backed companies
SVP titles are often deliberately withheld to keep the executive team small and equity concentrated among fewer people.