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UNLOCK REPUTATION

The Currency of Collaboration

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Core Message

Reputation is widely regarded as one of an organization's most valuable assets, yet few institutions understand what it is or how it works. While branding, finance, and human resources have established their own functions, resources, and authority, reputation remains scattered across departments, often treated reactively as a communications problem. This happens because reputation is misunderstood. It is not something that can be bought or controlled. It is a social system through which people judge an organization's conduct and decide whether to support it or stand in its way. Until institutions recognize this distinction, reputation will continue to lack the identity, authority, and resources needed to manage it effectively.

Guiding Principle

Reputation is a complex human social system, but a simple way to understand its value is to think of it as a currency. A strong reputation gives an institution a favorable exchange rate, earning greater collaboration from its stakeholders. A weak reputation diminishes that exchange rate, increasing resistance and the cost of doing business.

About the Author

For over 20 years Roy Persson has advised Fortune 500 companies on reputation, public trust, and institutional legitimacy. His work sits at the intersection of corporate leadership, public affairs, and societal accountability, guiding senior executives as they navigate regulatory scrutiny, activism, crisis, and long-term reputational risk. He has developed multi-stakeholder reputation frameworks that translate values, trust, and evolving expectations into practical guidance for leadership decision-making across complex institutional environments.

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The Book at a Glance:

The elevator pitch: It is a business strategy book that challenges how institutions understand and manage reputation, revealing how reputation shapes whether people choose to support an organization or stand in its way. It makes the case for reputation to have its own identity and authority within organizations rather than remaining fragmented across marketing, communications, legal, and public affairs.

Who buys this book? Leaders and professionals across business, government, academia, consulting, and media who are responsible for managing reputation, navigating public scrutiny, and earning the trust and support their organizations need to succeed.

Who won't buy this book? Readers looking for step-by-step guides to managing PR crises, writing corporate messages, measuring trust, or addressing specific social responsibility issues. Rather than focusing on individual tactics, this book examines how reputation works and why organizations need to fundamentally rethink their approach to managing it.

What shelf would this book be put on? Primarily business strategy and leadership, with crossover appeal in current affairs and books examining the relationship between business and society. Its broader themes of corporate power, trust, and accountability also make it relevant to general nonfiction readers interested in how modern institutions shape our world.

What is the story arc? The book begins by examining how corporations became so powerful and why technological change, political polarization, and growing public scrutiny have made reputation increasingly difficult to manage. It then steps back through human history to explain how reputation evolved, how people form judgments about others, and why reputation became confused with brand. From there, it examines how corporate decisions and behavior shape reputation, how different stakeholders interpret those actions, and why their willingness to support or challenge an organization can determine its success. The book closes by confronting the misconceptions that have kept reputation fragmented across corporate functions and makes the case for giving it the identity, authority, and resources needed to become a central part of how organizations operate.

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Pitching the Book: One Pager

The Hook: In a world defined by political polarization, technological acceleration, and declining trust, reputation has become one of the most powerful forces shaping institutional success. Remarkably, it also remains misunderstood and neglected. The emerging reality is that strong products, powerful brands, and exceptional performance are no longer enough. Increasingly, success depends on the support and collaboration of the people and communities organizations depend on most. Whether that support is earned or withheld is ultimately a matter of reputation. But as the forces shaping reputation accelerate, the ways institutions understand and manage it have failed to keep pace. Organizations that fail to rethink their approach to reputation risk more than losing trust. They risk losing the very collaboration they need to succeed.

The Big Idea: Drawing on history, sociology, behavioral science, and real-world corporate consulting experience, Unlock Reputation reframes reputation as a social system with roots that can be traced through the evolution of human societies. Long before brands, contracts, or formal institutions existed, reputation helped establish the spoken and unspoken rules of human collaboration, determining who earned trust, who gained support, and who was excluded. It was a fundamental social mechanism that enabled communities, markets, and civilizations to develop and prosper. Today, this ancient system is colliding with the realities of the modern world. Misinformation, political polarization, artificial intelligence, algorithmic amplification, and short-term incentives are changing how people understand and interpret the world around them, making reputation increasingly fragile, legitimacy more contested, and collaboration more difficult to sustain.

Why Now? Reputation has always shaped an institution's legitimacy, but this book could not have landed earlier. Twenty-five years ago, corporate success was measured primarily through performance, scale, and brand strength. Reputation was understood largely through commercial success and public image, with less attention paid to how corporate behavior affected people and society. The idea that reputation hinges on social and moral judgments would have seemed distant from conventional business strategy. Today, that gap in thinking is narrowing, and the distinction between

corporate performance and societal expectations is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. The challenge magnifies as companies attempt to resolve reputation issues with familiar, but increasingly inadequate, tools such as branding, messaging, and crisis management. This leaves reputation vulnerable and fragile. Until institutions fundamentally rethink what it is and develop the capabilities needed to manage it effectively, they will remain exposed to risks they struggle to anticipate, understand, or control.

The Audience: The book is written for senior leaders responsible for managing reputation, navigating public scrutiny, and earning the trust and support their organizations need to succeed. This includes executives in corporate communications, public affairs, reputation, ESG, legal, and business strategy, as well as policymakers, advisors, and media professionals examining corporate behavior and accountability. The book is not intended for readers seeking a tactical playbook or marketing manual. Instead, it is written for those who want a deeper understanding of how reputation works, why it breaks down, and how organizations can better manage it. Readers gain practical approaches for distinguishing brand from reputation, understanding and managing different stakeholder expectations, identifying reputational risks before a crisis, and navigating challenging social issues with greater clarity and confidence.

Differentiation: Many books tell readers why trust, values, and reputation matter. *Unlock Reputation* assumes readers already know this. Rather than placing trust on another pedestal, it asks a more fundamental question: *Do organizations really understand what reputation is and how it works?* Where other books reduce reputation to tools, metrics, best practices, or checklists, *Unlock Reputation* embraces its complexity. It takes readers through historical, social, moral, political, and economic perspectives, tracing how reputation evolved as a mechanism of human collaboration. Along the way, it challenges the misconceptions that have kept reputation fragmented across corporate functions and misunderstood as a discipline. Rather than offering another toolkit or communications strategy, the book promises something more fundamental: a new way to understand reputation and rethink how institutions approach it. Its greatest practical contribution is giving readers the knowledge and perspective to recognize what needs to change, why it matters, and how to begin.

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Market Positioning

Unlock Reputation is a business strategy and leadership book with crossover appeal in current affairs, sociology, and the relationship between business and society. It addresses one of the most important yet poorly understood challenges facing modern institutions, which is how to earn and sustain collaboration with the people they depend on.

The book challenges the conventional approach to reputation as something primarily managed through branding, communications, or crisis response. Drawing on history, social science, and corporate experience, it demonstrates how reputation influences institutional success and why managing it requires a broader understanding of human behavior, stakeholder expectations, and organizational decision-making.

Positioned alongside leading works on corporate reputation, trust, and organizational leadership, Unlock Reputation offers readers more than an explanation of why reputation matters. It provides a foundation for rethinking how institutions understand reputation, recognize emerging risks, and develop the capabilities needed to manage it as a central part of their operations.

Book Inspirations & Comparisons: *Trust (Francis Fukuyama), Reputation: Realizing Value from the Corporate Image (Charles Fombrun), Net Positive (Paul Polman and Andrew Winston), Reputation Rules (Daniel Diermeier), The Righteous Mind (Jonathan Haidt)*

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Comparable Books

Net Positive by Paul Polman and Andrew Winston (2021)
Makes the case for businesses to create greater value for society through responsible leadership and stakeholder engagement. While Net Positive focuses on what companies should do and the leadership required to achieve it, Unlock Reputation examines how stakeholders judge corporate behavior and why those judgments determine their willingness to collaborate, support, or resist an institution.

Reputation Rules by Daniel Diermeier (2011)
Examines how organizations can build and protect reputation through business strategy and risk management. Unlock Reputation is broader, exploring reputation's roots in human social behavior and explaining how different stakeholder judgments influence institutional legitimacy, cooperation, and long-term success.

Trust by Francis Fukuyama (1995)
Explores how trust and social values enable economic prosperity and cooperation across societies. Unlock Reputation builds on this by examining how reputation functions within modern institutions, how corporate decisions influence stakeholder judgments, and why organizations must rethink their reputation approach.

The Righteous Mind by Jonathan Haidt (2012)
Examines how moral intuitions shape human judgments, contributing to political and social divisions. Unlock Reputation uses these judgment concepts as the basis for understanding reputation, exploring how organizations navigate competing values, expectations, and judgments among the people and communities they depend on.

Reputation: Realizing Value from the Corporate Image by Charles Fombrun (1996)

A foundational work establishing corporate reputation as a valuable business asset with important consequences for competitive performance and stakeholder relationships. Unlock Reputation builds on this foundation by examining reputation as a human social system rather than primarily an organizational asset, connecting its historical origins to modern stakeholder judgments and the need for stronger reputation governance.

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Who This Book is For

This book speaks to people who influence and are responsible for institutional and societal legitimacy.

Primary Audience: Senior leaders responsible for managing reputation and long-term institutional risk, including executives in corporate communications, public affairs, reputation, ESG, legal, business strategy, and governance. These readers navigate public scrutiny, regulatory pressure, activism, and competing stakeholder expectations. Their responsibility extends beyond protecting institutions from risk to earning the trust, support, and cooperation necessary to operate, influence, and succeed.

Secondary Audience: Policymakers, management consultants, corporate advisors, think tank researchers, and media professionals who examine corporate behavior, shape public discussions about accountability, or advise institutions navigating the relationship between business, government, and society.

Psychographic Profile: The book also has the potential to resonate with intellectually curious readers drawn to history, political dynamics, behavioral psychology, economics, and the study of human societies. Although not its primary audience, these readers may be interested in the book's exploration of corporate power and legitimacy, moral authority, the evolution of social systems, the rise and decline of civilizations, and the forces that shape collaboration, conflict, and public outrage.

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Why Now?

Industrialization and innovation introduced a new rhythm to society, one defined by speed. Technological and scientific advances unlocked extraordinary prosperity, from electricity and railroads to antibiotics that saved millions of lives. But modern advances in computing, media, and communications have disrupted the relationship between society and its institutions. The world is now moving faster than institutions can adapt, exposing tensions between technological progress and established social and moral expectations. These tensions have existed throughout human history. What is different today is the scale of institutions, their speed, and the visibility of their consequences.

Twenty-five years ago, corporate success was measured primarily through performance, scale, and brand strength. Reputation was understood largely through commercial success and public image, with less attention paid to how corporate behavior affected people and society. The idea that reputation hinges on social and moral judgments would have seemed distant from conventional business strategy. It would have been difficult to position a book that examined reputation through the lenses of human behavior, morality, and sociology, then argued that institutions needed to fundamentally rethink their approach to managing it.

But the distance between business performance and societal expectations is closing, making it increasingly difficult for institutions to treat them as separate concerns.

Today, strong products, powerful brands, and exceptional financial performance are no longer enough to guarantee an institution's success. Corporate decisions and their consequences are more visible than ever, while technology, artificial intelligence, political polarization, and competing societal expectations are changing how people interpret corporate behavior. Public judgments can form and spread rapidly, giving stakeholders greater opportunities to organize, challenge, and influence institutions. Success increasingly requires more than delivering value to customers and shareholders. It depends on earning the support and collaboration of people, communities, and institutions whose expectations are not always aligned.

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The world has changed rapidly, but the understanding of reputation has not kept pace. Organizations continue to rely on familiar approaches built around branding, communications, measurement, and crisis management. These tools remain useful, but they cannot independently address the deeper questions of how reputation forms, why people judge organizations differently, or what makes stakeholders willing to cooperate. Too often, institutions respond to the visible consequences of reputational problems without fully understanding the decisions, behaviors, and competing expectations that produced them.

For more than two decades, I have worked with companies that recognize reputation as one of their most valuable assets. I have sat in rooms where leaders readily agree on its importance, only to leave with different interpretations of what reputation actually means. That agreement rarely translates into a shared understanding of who is responsible for reputation or what organizations should do to manage it. Across my consulting work and research, I have repeatedly encountered the same underlying contradiction. Reputation is considered essential to institutional success, yet it rarely receives the organizational attention, authority, or resources given to other critical business functions.

Reputation has become locked in its own misunderstanding, and that misunderstanding is becoming increasingly costly. The forces shaping it are accelerating, while the institutional capacity to understand and respond to them remains underdeveloped. Institutions struggle with reputation partly because they cannot control how others judge their conduct, eliminate conflicting expectations, or prevent every controversy. But control is the wrong objective. The better approach is to understand those judgments, anticipate their consequences, and make decisions that strengthen the relationships on which institutional success depends.

That is why this book matters now. Reputation is not a new concern, and its importance is not a recent discovery. What has changed is the urgency of understanding how it works. Unlock Reputation makes the case that the time has come to give reputation the identity, authority, and capabilities needed to become a central part of how institutions operate.

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Central Thesis and Core Arguments

The Reputation Paradox

Corporations are among the most powerful institutions in modern society. They create prosperity at extraordinary scale, build technologies that change lives, and solve problems that governments cannot. Yet the same systems that make them so successful also produce social, environmental, and economic consequences that threaten their legitimacy.

This is not a failure of execution. Corporations do exactly as they are designed. They optimize, scale, and deliver returns. Short-term incentives outrank long-term resilience. Growth displaces workers and communities. The mobility of supply chains puts harm at a distance where no one has to look at it. These consequences are what the design itself predicts will happen. But what has changed over the past few decades is that these consequences are now visible, attributable, and judged in real time.

Scale and performance cannot resolve these consequences, because they are what produces them. Strong products, powerful brands, and healthy financials show that a company is capable. None of these show that institutions are accountable to the consequences of their own scale. This is why a corporation can be operationally excellent and reputationally failing at the same time.

At the heart of this tension is reputation. In the modern era it is confused with a communications approach, a brand asset, or a compliance posture. When leaders do confront its moral dimension, it gets reduced to corporate virtue, social responsibility, or altruism. It is none of these. Reputation does not reward an institution for being good. It rewards conduct that is predictable, reliable, and answerable to the expectations people hold of it.

Reputation is a human social system which is older than markets, contracts, or the corporation itself. Before these modern constructs existed, people used reputation judgments to interpret the conduct of others and decide who should hold power and who should be excluded. That system created spoken and unspoken expectations about how people should behave, and whether someone was safe to collaborate with. Corporations inherited this system, but they never built it into how they operate.

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Institutions did as they were designed to do. They scaled and grew quickly, while also forgetting the reputation judgments that made their long-term growth possible.

Today, in the modern corporate organizational structure, reputation sits everywhere but belongs to no one. Communications cannot change corporate behavior. Legal manages compliance, not consequence. Operations optimizes for efficiency. Each function treats the symptom in front of it, and the structural problem that produces reputational consequences keeps returning, just as expected.

Unlock Reputation argues that the social reputation system itself cannot be controlled, but the conditions that produce expectations and judgments can be governed. Doing so requires two structural capabilities. The first is consequence-awareness, the ability to anticipate the consequences of operations and decisions before stakeholders discover them. The second is coordination, which includes behavioral alignment, decision coherence, incentive systems, and communications that consistently align with the values the institution claims. When either capability is missing, an integrity gap opens, and legitimacy erodes behind it.

Closing that gap requires giving reputation its own authority, resources, and governance, with stakeholder intelligence and accountability built in, rather than assigning it to a disconnected function that lacks the capacity to resolve it. Reputation is the currency of collaboration. Institutions that build it into how they operate, as infrastructure, earn a stronger exchange rate, with more support and advocacy. Those that leave reputation institutionally homeless get a weaker one, and the cost to repair it only grows.

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What Inspired This Book

I wrote this book because I have watched countless companies trap themselves in a reputation doom loop, and no one has named it. It isn't one problem. It's four mechanisms that reinforce each other, remaining largely invisible until they begin to undermine the legitimacy on which a company depends.

First, reputation gets confused with brand (constantly). The reasons are understandable. Brand is easier to understand, model, and manage. Business schools teach it, agencies excel at it, and executives can point to a campaign and see results. So if brand image is relatively easy to explain and manage, why not manage reputation the same way? The problem is that they aren't the same concept. Yet executives continue to assume reputation should behave like brand. When the quick execution and measurable payoff never arrive, confusion grows and investment shrinks.

Second, reputation is underfunded. Compared with reputation, it's easier to connect investments in branding, employee training, and supply chain improvements to measurable financial outcomes. This makes budgets, talent, and dedicated business functions easier to defend. Have you ever met someone who majored in reputation? Because responsibility for reputation is scattered across functions, it's difficult to establish the structure and funding it needs. The lack of proactive investment becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. When reputational problems emerge, institutions are left responding to symptoms rather than addressing the underlying conditions that produced them.

Third, reputation has a bad brand (yes, I said that right). When things go well, different functions claim victory. It must have been the new product launch. It was a boost in employee morale. It was the safeguards introduced by compliance. Reputation is less visible, even as it influences so many parts of the business. This makes its benefits harder to recognize. But when things go wrong, reputation quickly finds its way into the conversation. Over time, other functions become associated with success, while reputation becomes associated with scrutiny, controversy, and institutional crisis.

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This reinforces the tendency to invest in other functions rather than build a dedicated approach to managing reputation.

Fourth, the complexity of reputation makes it look risky. Reputation is difficult to define, comes in many forms, and rarely fits neatly into corporate structures. I have seen executives make it a strategic priority, only to lose ground with their peers for championing it. I have also watched smart executives who understand perfectly well that reputation matters choose not to act because the effort is immense and the path forward isn't easily understood across the organization. That isn't laziness. It's rational self-preservation in a system that was never designed to support a dedicated approach to reputation.

This is how the doom loop repeats. Without proactive investment, institutions become more vulnerable to reputational crises and less equipped to manage them. As companies repeatedly confront problems they struggle to resolve, reputation becomes associated with costs rather than benefits. That negative association makes leaders reluctant to champion it. Without leadership to create clarity and understanding, reputation continues to be confused with brand. And because reputation cannot deliver the same quick, measurable results expected of branding, the business case for investment remains difficult to defend. Funding stays limited, the underlying problems remain, and the loop continues. Over and over.

This book is about the way out. It gives leaders the language they have been missing and the case for building and defending reputation as infrastructure. After years of helping clients navigate reputational repair, I wanted to write the book that makes the clearest possible argument for changing how the industry thinks about reputation and breaking the reputation doom loop.

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Author Platform

Roy Persson is a reputation consultant with more than 20 years of experience helping Fortune 500 companies navigate reputation, public trust, stakeholder expectations, and institutional risk. He has held senior research and advisory positions at global consultancies such as Ipsos and YouGov, working across corporate communications, public affairs, and business strategy. As Head of Reputation and PR at National Research Group, he developed a reputation research and measurement practice that helped major corporations better understand stakeholder expectations, reputational risk, and the relationship between corporate conduct and business outcomes.

His credibility is supported by original research, industry publications, and speaking engagements with organizations including AMEC, PRSA, and the Public Affairs Council. His work has been presented to corporate communications and public affairs leaders, and his reputation measurement frameworks have informed decision-making at major global companies. He is also involved with the Institute for Public Relations through its Measurement Commission and ELEVATE leadership program, strengthening his relationships within the communications and corporate reputation community.

He also launched *Unlock Reputation*, a dedicated thought leadership platform that includes a website, research commentary, and a Substack publication exploring the ideas behind the book. Through LinkedIn, where he has more than 4,000 followers, he shares research, analysis, and commentary with a professional audience spanning corporate affairs, communications, research, and business leadership.

His platform is built on professional credibility and access to a highly relevant audience rather than mass-market visibility. The book creates an opportunity to extend that reach through industry speaking engagements, professional associations, executive workshops, academic discussions, and continued publishing. These channels offer a direct path to the leaders and practitioners most likely to find value in *Unlock Reputation*, while creating opportunities to introduce its ideas to a wider business and institutional audience.

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Chapter Outline

Chapter 1: The Tension of Corporate Power

Corporations were built to maximize scale and speed. That creates velocity gaps where innovation outpaces governance, and competence itself becomes a vulnerability once the consequences become visible.

Chapter 2: Reputation Hanging in the Balance

Journalism, regulation, and democratic institutions weakened at the same time, and trust fractured with them. With the old arbiters of legitimacy gone, reputation became the mechanism through which legitimacy is negotiated.

Chapter 3: Contesting Corporate Legitimacy

Legitimacy is no longer earned by competence alone. It is judged across four domains of scrutiny (balance, influence, dignity, and shared impact). Sustained scrutiny eventually tightens into constraints on a company's license to operate.

Chapter 4: How Reputation Forged Civilization

For two million years, reputation has been the primary human signal for deciding who deserves collaboration. Modern corporations inherited that system but organized around competence, and never built reputation into how they operate.

Chapter 5: Before the Rules Arrive

Long before formal law, reputation made behavior predictable and reliable between strangers. It is the oldest accountability mechanism, and it still operates in the gaps the rules leave open.

Chapter 6: Separate Strategy for Separate Signals

Brand earns preference by signaling competence. Reputation earns permission by signaling integrity. They require separate strategies, and conflating them creates the illusion of reputation management.

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Chapter 7: Coding Organizational Behavior

Values only shape conduct when they are embedded as operational code in incentives, hiring, and capital allocation. Where they are not, the gap between what an institution says and does widens until reputation collapses into it.

Chapter 8: Tension Along Multiple Dimensions

External pressures force an institution into decision tests. Every choice, including silence, becomes a signal that stakeholders use to judge reputation. The goal is not universal alignment with all stakeholders, but coherence between values and conduct.

Chapter 9: Reputation Economics

Reputation produces two outcomes, influence and resilience, by expanding stakeholders' willingness to act and keeping that willingness durable under pressure. Most institutions undervalue both until they come under threat.

Chapter 10: The Reputation Audit

Listening to stakeholders is not the same as understanding and responding to them. The Reputation Audit connects fragmented intelligence by evaluating stakeholder relationships and expectation gaps, then outlines how to right-size the response.

Chapter 11: The False Binary: Perform Loud or Stay Silent

Stakeholders expect institutions to address societal issues, but polarization invites opposition when they act. That is the Responsibility–Risk Paradox, and since no response is risk free, institutions can only choose the social posture of best fit.

Chapter 12: An Unresolved Reputation Mandate

Reputation infrastructure is missing because reputation is misunderstood, hard to fund, fragmented, and risky for any one leader to champion. This chapter lays out the path forward. Institutions can build it now or keep paying for its absence.

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The Benefits Readers Gain

A diagnosis of why institutional legitimacy is under strain. The book shows how scale, visible consequences, fragmented information, and polarized expectations have made legitimacy contested, even for companies that perform well. Readers gain a clear explanation of why competence no longer guarantees collaboration, and where scrutiny concentrates.

A new understanding of what reputation is. Reputation is not a brand asset, a communications function, or a measure of corporate virtue. It is the human social system through which stakeholders judge institutional conduct and decide whether to collaborate. Readers learn why it cannot be controlled, but the conditions that produce it can be governed.

Strategic clarity between brand and reputation. Brand earns preference by signaling competence. Reputation earns permission by signaling integrity. Readers learn why conflating the two misdirects investment, creates the illusion of reputation management, and hides risk.

Practical tools to find and close expectation gaps. The Reputation Audit shows where stakeholder relationships are most vulnerable and why. Frameworks help leaders match a right-sized response to each gap, moving from reactive damage control toward strategic foresight.

A clear way to decide when and how to engage on societal issues. There is no risk-free position between silence and advocacy. Readers learn to choose a social posture deliberately and execute it credibly, instead of defaulting to silence, imitation of peers, or performative statements.

A blueprint for building reputation infrastructure. The solution is a defined structure (governance, ownership, authority, and resources) and the operations (intelligence, values, incentives, and coordination) to make reputation an institutional capability. It also gives leaders the case to make internally, with answers to the financial, structural, and personal-risk barriers that keep it from being built.

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The Marketing Plan and Platform

The marketing strategy for *Unlock Reputation* is built around reaching a highly relevant professional audience through established industry relationships, thought leadership, speaking engagements, and practical applications of the book's concepts. Rather than pursuing broad consumer visibility alone, the plan focuses on corporate leaders, communications professionals, researchers, advisors, and educators who can introduce the book and its ideas into their organizations and professional networks.

Conferences & Speaking Engagements:

Industry conferences and professional associations will be a primary channel for introducing the book to corporate communications, public affairs, reputation, and business leadership audiences. The author has established relationships across these communities through more than 20 years of consulting, research, publishing, and professional engagement.

His involvement with the American Marketing Association and the Institute for Public Relations, including its Measurement Commission and ELEVATE program, provides opportunities to engage with communications researchers and senior practitioners. He has also presented at industry events associated with organizations such as PRSA, AMEC, and the Public Affairs Council.

- Public Relations Society of America (PRSA ICON)
- Institute for Public Relations (IPR)
- International Public Relations Research Conference (IPRRC)
- American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR)
- International Association of Business Communicators (IABC)
- Arthur W. Page Society
- Select corporate affairs, reputation, and business leadership conferences

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Thought Leadership and Digital Publishing:

The author launched the *Unlock Reputation* Substack and website in 2026 to establish a dedicated platform for exploring corporate reputation, stakeholder judgment, institutional legitimacy, and the relationship between business and society.

The Substack will feature original essays, research commentary, and practical applications of the book's ideas. Each publication will contribute to a growing body of accessible thought leadership while encouraging readers to engage with the book's central arguments.

LinkedIn provides an additional distribution channel, with an established audience of more than 4,000 followers spanning corporate affairs, communications, research, and business leadership.

Together, these platforms will support pre-publication awareness, launch promotion, and continued engagement with readers.

- Substack
- LinkedIn (More than 4,000 followers)
- Unlock Reputation

Podcasts and Industry Conversation:

The author will pursue guest appearances on podcasts serving corporate communications, public affairs, leadership, and research professionals. These conversations offer opportunities to explore the book's concepts in greater depth and reach audiences already interested in corporate reputation and institutional decision-making. Potential programs include *Trust Talk, The New CCO Podcast, On Top of PR, Always On, Rock N' Roll Research, Intellicast, Chats with Chip*, and other relevant industry programs.

Plans also include launching an Unlock Reputation podcast featuring discussions with corporate leaders, researchers, and contributors to the book. These conversations would extend the book's intellectual reach while building an ongoing community around the challenges of understanding and managing reputation.

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Executive Workshops and Academic Engagement:

The book's practical frameworks create opportunities for executive education, professional development, and organizational workshops. Programs built around the Reputation Audit, stakeholder expectations, values, and institutional decision-making can help leadership teams apply the book's concepts to real organizational challenges.

The author is developing workshop formats that combine practical exercises with guided discussion, offering opportunities for corporate engagements, professional association events, university programs, and bulk book purchases. Academic outreach will focus on business, communications, public relations, and organizational leadership programs, including opportunities for guest lectures, classroom discussions, and research collaboration.

Extended Platform Assets:

The Unlock Reputation website provides a growing collection of resources intended to make the book's ideas more accessible and interactive. These include visual frameworks, practical examples, AI-generated audio discussions, and interactive tools that allow visitors to explore reputation-related decisions and challenges.

Additional assets under development or consideration include the Scale & Scrutiny card game, executive personality assessments, the Quarterly Review business simulator, and workshop programs such as The Values Experiment and The Reputation Blindspot.

These resources are intended to reinforce the book's ideas, encourage continued engagement, and create additional opportunities to introduce its concepts through speaking, teaching, and consulting.

The central objective is to build a sustained professional audience for Unlock Reputation, with the book serving as the foundation for continued thought leadership, industry discussion, and practical organizational application.

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Blurb & Book Commentary

The author has secured verbal commitments from recognized voices in corporate reputation and institutional leadership, pending final manuscript review. Additional blurb support is expected as marketing collateral and the finished manuscript circulates to broader networks within the corporate communications, public affairs, and academic communities. The author's established relationships across these fields position him to gather substantive endorsements from senior practitioners and thought leaders as the publication process moves forward.

Verbally committed:

- Ethan McCarty - Integral: CEO
- Todd Khozein - SecondMuse: CEO
- Scott Linklater - TrustBuilder: CEO
- Sandra Macleod - Echo Research: CEO
- Tina McCorkindale - Institute for Public Relations: CEO
- Johna Burke – AMEC Measurement and Evaluation: CEO
- Ray Day - Stagwell: Vice Chair (former CCO IBM)
- Jason McGrath - Ipsos: Executive Vice President, Head of Corporate Reputation
- Rana Komar - Ruth: President
- Douglas Pinkham - Public Affairs Council: Former President
- Paul Abbate - Boston College Carroll School of Management: Professor
- Gregg Feistman - Temple University: Professor
- Sarah Myles - Eli Lilly: Global Communications Senior Director
- Charles H. Green - Trusted Advisor Associates: Founder
- Heather McCague - Xero: VP Internal Communications
- Kay Brungs Laud - Fairlife: Vice President, Public Affairs
- Christine Woodhouse - Cox Communications: Director
- Jamie Notter - Propel: Culture Scientist

Potential blurbs, not yet committed:

- Cara Buscaglia - Talkwalker, CIO
- Julian Crowley - DoorDash: Head of Public Affairs
- Nishant Roy - Chobani: Chief Impact Officer

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Book Back Cover Jacket

What if the thing an organization depends on most is the thing it understands least?

Corporations have become among the most powerful institutions in modern society. They create prosperity at extraordinary scale, transform industries, and shape the world around them. But the systems that make them successful also produce visible, attributable consequences that make them vulnerable. Strong products, powerful brands, and financial results no longer guarantee the trust and collaboration that institutions need to thrive.

In Unlock Reputation, Roy Persson challenges the idea that reputation is a branding exercise, a communications problem, a crisis to repair, or an act of corporate virtue. Drawing on history, sociology, behavioral science, and more than two decades advising Fortune 500 companies, he shows that reputation is something far more fundamental. It is a human social system, older than markets and corporations, through which people judge institutions and decide whether to support them, collaborate with them, or stand in their way.

Through real-world cases, practical frameworks, and concept visuals, the book explains how reputation forms, why it so often fails inside the organizations that depend on it, and what leaders can do about it. Reputation cannot be controlled, but it can be understood, anticipated, and governed by institutions willing to build the structure, authority, and accountability to do so.

Institutions have a choice. They can build the infrastructure to navigate the turbulence of the modern era, or keep paying for its absence.

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Proposed Format and Specs

Word Count and Length

Unlock Reputation is projected to be 90,000–100,000 words, resulting in approximately 400 pages. This length allows for a comprehensive exploration of reputation, from its origins in human societies to its role in modern institutions, while maintaining the clarity and depth needed to make a complex subject accessible.

Format and Trim Size

The preferred format is a 6" × 9" hardcover, positioning the book as a substantial business strategy title for executive and professional audiences. An e-book edition will accommodate digital readers, with a paperback edition potentially following based on market demand.

Chapter Structure

The book is organized into 12 chapters, plus an introduction and conclusion, divided into four parts. It begins by examining the growing power of corporations and the pressures reshaping their relationships with society. It then explores the human origins of reputation and the distinction between reputation and brand. The third part explains how corporate conduct, stakeholder judgments, and competing expectations shape reputation and its consequences. The final part examines the challenges institutions face in managing reputation and the organizational capabilities needed to make it a central part of how they operate.

Organization and Adaptability

The book is designed to accommodate different reading interests and levels of engagement. Senior executives seeking a more direct path from understanding the challenges to identifying practical solutions can focus on the opening and concluding sections. Readers interested in the deeper historical, social, and behavioral foundations of reputation can follow the complete narrative. This approach makes the book accessible to time-constrained leaders without sacrificing the depth that researchers, practitioners, and intellectually curious readers may seek.

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Visual Elements

The book will feature approximately 70–80 original visuals, including the Corporate Legitimacy Curve, conceptual diagrams, tables, and practical frameworks. These illustrations help explain how reputation forms, how stakeholder judgments influence institutional outcomes, and how organizations can recognize and navigate reputational risk. Visuals are integrated throughout the manuscript to make complex concepts easier to understand and apply.

Tone and Accessibility

The writing combines historical narrative, social science, real-world corporate examples, and practical business insight. It is intended to be intellectually rigorous without becoming overly academic, accessible to senior leaders without reducing complex ideas to simplistic formulas, and analytical without becoming moralistic or prescriptive.