The Reader Journey

The twelve chapters of Unlock Reputation take readers from the growing pressures facing modern institutions to the human origins of reputation and the social forces that shape how organizations are judged. The book explores how corporate decisions, stakeholder expectations, and competing values influence reputation and the willingness of others to collaborate. It concludes by challenging the misconceptions that have kept reputation fragmented across business functions and making the case for giving it the identity, authority, and resources needed to become a central part of how institutions operate.

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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.

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.

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.