Module 13| Relevance, Reputation Management, Crisis Management | Post # 11 LIS707-02

Where do library relevance, reputation, and crisis management intersect?

They intersect at the exact moment everything hits the fan and someone has to decide what kind of institution you really are. Relevance, reputation, and crisis management aren't separate concerns; they're braided together like a fuse. And when that fuse is lit, it either burns clean or blows up the whole damn room.

Anderson (2020) makes it plain: if you're not actively shaping your narrative, someone else will. If you haven't built trust ahead of time, your "messaging plan" during a crisis is just damage control. That's what made me think about how badly Donald Trump botched the COVID crisis. There was no trust, no humility, no clarity, so when it came time to lead, his reputation and relevance collapsed in real time. He didn't manage the crisis, the crisis managed him.

Libraries, by contrast, have a shot at doing it differently. Rebecca Raven's talk hits on this—how libraries can "level up" by staying visible, flexible, and human. And Mark Ray is right: the profession has a branding problem, and we don't solve it by being silent. We solve it by showing up; during quiet times *and* when the floor drops out.

Crisis management isn't just about the fire drill; it's about everything you've done *before* the alarm goes off. If the community sees you as relevant, and you've built a reputation of being responsive and real, then you can lead through hard moments with credibility. But if you've been passive, transactional, or performative, the crisis will expose that instantly.

So yeah, these things aren't separate. They're one organism. And how you feed it, shape it, and speak through it determines whether your library becomes a steady presence… or just another institution people stop trusting when it matters most.

References

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