CRISIS IS INEVITABLE. PREPAREDNESS IS A CHOICE.

...anticipate, adapt and align

A CONVERSATION WITH LISA-ANN JOSEPH · BY GISELLE HUDSON

Lisa-Ann Joseph never set out to become one of the region's leading crisis communication experts. But looking back, it's clear that her entire life prepared her for it.

She grew up surrounded by movement, literally. Her father, Eugene Joseph, built Trinidad Dance Theatre, a well-known institution that has been training dancers for decades. Lisa spent her early years in that world, absorbing the discipline, the precision, and the unwavering commitment to showing up prepared, no matter what.

It's funny how life works. At the time, she had no idea that those lessons (anticipation, adaptability and execution under pressure) would form the foundation of her career in corporate crisis management.

TRIAL BY FIRE

Lisa's path wasn't linear. She didn't start in the corporate world with a mapped-out plan. Instead, she jumped in headfirst, landing a job as a PR officer at the Family Planning Association of Trinidad and Tobago (FPATT). Talk about trial by fire.

FPATT was an NGO navigating complex, often controversial conversations around sexual and reproductive health. At just 22, Lisa found herself shaping messaging on issues that sparked heated public debate: abortion rights, contraception, family planning. If you think crisis communication is tricky, try handling a press conference when half the room wants you to succeed and the other half wants to shut you down.

> *"That job forced me to get comfortable with the uncomfortable."*

"It wasn't just about putting out press releases," she recalls. "It was about understanding the audience, anticipating backlash, and crafting messages that weren't just heard but actually understood."

That ability, to frame a message in a way that builds trust even in high-stakes situations, became Lisa's superpower.

From FPATT she moved into corporate communications, holding roles at First Citizens Bank, the TCL Group, Coca-Cola and BP. Each position honed her ability to manage reputations, guide leadership through difficult decisions, and ensure that when companies spoke, they did so with clarity, strategy and confidence.

Then, in 2007, she took the leap into entrepreneurship, launching Reputation Management Caribbean Ltd.

CRISIS-PROOFING STARTS LONG BEFORE THE CRISIS

There's a clear difference between businesses that weather storms well and those that crumble. It starts with culture.

Companies that handle crises effectively aren't just good at responding. They have built an internal culture where people are encouraged to raise red flags before things go wrong. Employees know what's expected of them in uncertain situations. Leadership has established clear, open communication long before a crisis forces them to speak up.

"Businesses that struggle in a crisis," Lisa explains, "tend to have poor communication at every level. If leaders are inconsistent, secretive or unclear when things are good, they're going to be exponentially worse under pressure."

THE LEADERSHIP MISTAKE THAT TURNS SMALL PROBLEMS INTO CRISES

When a crisis hits, all eyes turn to leadership. Employees, customers, investors and the public look to them for reassurance. But here's the harsh reality: if leaders aren't aligned internally, their crisis response will be messy, slow and ineffective.

"When there's no clarity within leadership, you'll see conflicting statements, delayed responses, or even complete silence, which can be just as damaging as a bad response," Lisa says.

She recalls a company that faced a major operational failure. Instead of aligning on a clear, unified response, the executive team argued internally. One department was ready to address customers; another wanted to wait for more information. The CEO hesitated, worried about legal implications.

The result? By the time they released a statement, the public had already made up its mind. Worse, because leadership wasn't aligned, the messaging was inconsistent, leading to more confusion and distrust.

> *"Trust translates into revenue. Lose trust, and you lose business."*

THE ONE THING EVERY BUSINESS SHOULD DO

If a business could do just one thing today to improve its crisis preparedness, Lisa's advice is simple: practise your response before you need it.

"This is something very few companies actually do," she says. "They might have a plan, but they don't run real-life simulations. So when a crisis hits, they're making decisions in real time, under pressure, with no practice."

Her recommendation? Scenario training:

- *Run drills* for likely crises: a data breach, a PR disaster, a supply chain failure.
- *Assign clear roles in advance.* Who speaks? Who monitors social media? Who keeps customers informed?
- *Stress-test your leadership team.* Simulate real-time pressure and see how they handle it.

WHY COMPANIES FAIL TO COMMUNICATE IN A CRISIS

If there's one mistake Lisa sees over and over, it's this: companies wait too long to communicate.

It's a fear-based response. Leaders hope that if they stay silent long enough, the problem will resolve itself. But in today's world of instant news cycles and social media amplification, silence is an open invitation for speculation and misinformation to take over.

> *"People are going to talk about your crisis, with or without you. The longer you wait to speak, the less control you have over the narrative."*

She advises companies to set a crisis response timeline in advance:

- *Acknowledge the issue early*. Even without all the answers, reassure stakeholders that you're aware and working on it.
- *Be transparent*. Avoid vague statements like "We're looking into it." Outline exactly what's being done.
- *Update consistently*. Don't release one statement and disappear. Regular updates show competence and control.

THE NEXT BIG RISK NO ONE IS TALKING ABOUT

Asked about emerging risks, Lisa doesn't hesitate. "AI-driven misinformation. Deepfakes. Fake news. The ability for bad actors to completely fabricate stories and make them look real."

Companies aren't ready for this, she warns. While they may monitor real customer feedback, very few are actively monitoring false narratives being created about them.

"If you're only reacting when the damage is already done, you're too late."

Her advice? Real-time reputation monitoring, not just of the brand, but of key executives, suppliers and even competitors. The faster misinformation is identified, the better it can be countered before it spreads.

WHERE TO START

For companies that aren't yet crisis-ready, Lisa suggests starting with a vulnerability audit:

- What are your biggest risks?
- What's the worst-case scenario in each area of your business?
- Who is responsible for response and communication in each case?

Too often, companies think about these things only once they're already in trouble. But the businesses that survive and thrive do the work before the storm hits.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Crisis management isn't about having a plan sitting on a shelf. It's about building a culture where preparedness is part of how you operate, every day.

Lisa-Ann Joseph isn't just an expert in crisis communication. She's a strategist who helps companies build resilience, credibility and trust before they ever need it.

THREE TAKEAWAYS FROM LISA-ANN'S SPOTLIGHT

1 *Crisis is inevitable; preparation is a choice.*
You can't control external crises, but you can control your response through proactive strategy, clear leadership and adaptable teams.

2 *The right people make the difference.*
Alignment within teams matters: hire people who don't just have skills, but understand the mission and can perform under pressure.

3 *Leadership requires decisiveness and trust.*
Leaders must trust their judgment, decide quickly and communicate with clarity, especially in challenging times.



Lisa-Ann Joseph

Managing Director of Reputation Management Caribbean Ltd, which she founded in 2007. One of the region's leading crisis communication experts, with earlier roles at FPATT, First Citizens Bank, the TCL Group, Coca-Cola and BP.

LinkedIn
lisaann@rmcaribbean.net · 868.622.2764

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