

Ouch! That Stereotype Hurts, eLearning Program
Interview by Mike Streeter with Leslie Aguilar
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Since my original interview with Leslie Aguilar, over three years ago, the Ouch series of training programs and articles has continued to be among the most viewed and downloaded on our Web site. They have been used by hundreds of organizations throughout the world and many of our members have integrated the programs into their diversity and inclusion initiatives. Ouch started as a book, graduated to a DVD program, followed with a sequel program, “Ouch! Your Silence Hurts” and is now available as an eLearning program.

When I heard that Ouch was going to be released in an eLearning version, I was a little surprised. I’ve been involved with diversity and inclusion work for over twenty years and I’ve always felt more at home with training workshops that involve groups of people in face to face interaction. Frankly, I’ve been skeptical of any sort of distance learning for diversity work because I thought it lacked the personal, human connection that makes traditional workshops successful. I was very interested to hear how Leslie would respond to my concerns...

1) Why did you create an eLearning version of *Ouch! That Stereotype Hurts*? How is this different from the original DVD presentation?

We created *Ouch! That Stereotype Hurts* Online Learning Experience because we were frequently asked if *Ouch!* video were available in an eLearning format for individual use. In both formats, the key concepts and the skills remain the same. What is different is the methodology – the WAY the individual participates in the learning. The *Ouch!* program was originally designed for group learning. It comes with an extensive Leader’s Guide to help present key concepts and facilitate group discussion and activities. We recommend one to two hours for the facilitated group session.

When we created *Ouch! That Stereotype Hurts* Online Learning Experience, we knew it would be an individual learning experience, but we wanted to make sure that we captured the same concepts and feeling. So, there is an online host who introduces key points, explains activities, provides feedback on correct and incorrect answers, and reinforces learning, just as a live facilitator would do in the classroom. The full *Ouch!* video is embedded in the Online Learning Experience, along with extra features. The eLearning takes about 30 minutes to complete.

2) In my experience, people are skeptical about the use of eLearning programs for subjects that can be emotionally charged like diversity and inclusion. They are more inclined toward a face to face experience that a traditional workshop provides. How do you respond to these concerns?

I can relate to their feelings. I love face to face group learning, as well, because of the insight we gain from others whose life experiences are different than our own. And, for a long time, I

resisted providing eLearning versions of any of our diversity and inclusion workshops. But, as I began attending distance learning sessions myself, I was thrilled to participate in learning at my own pace and in my own space without the cost of traveling. Online learning doesn't replace classroom learning for me, but it is a great alternative when getting together in one physical location just isn't realistic. As a person long biased towards classroom training, I confess, well-designed eLearning can also be powerful. I'm no longer a skeptic.

- 3) **If an organization wants to implement *Ouch!* as part of their diversity and inclusion initiative, how do they choose between different methodologies such as facilitated video presentations and eLearning programs? What advice would you give?**

My advice is to choose the methodology that best fits your organization's situation and learning strategy. Classroom learning is a good solution when you can easily get people together in one place. From a strategic point of view, if you rely ONLY on traditional classroom learning, you reach far fewer people. It's much more costly for large, dispersed audiences and more difficult to sustain in tough economic times. Too often people in the field or at remote locations don't receive the same learning opportunities as those in centralized sites.

Ideally, organizations offer blended learning – traditional classroom, on-the-job training, and mentoring alongside technology-enabled learning, such as webinars and eLearning. Every methodology has its advantages. "Synchronous" (same time) learning, like classroom and other group experiences, offers rich networking, discussion, and the informal learning that occurs when people are together. "Asynchronous" (any time, any place) learning, such as books or eLearning, offers convenience, the ability to reach large numbers of employees over multiple sites and time zones, lower cost, and consistency of information for all users. Plus, eLearners can pause, repeat and revisit the training key concepts if desired.

With *Ouch!* we wanted to provide options for different situations. Organizations can choose *Ouch!* for classroom, intranet streaming, or hosted self-paced, individual online learning. They can blend the methodologies. For example, they can offer classroom training at central locations and eLearning for offsite employees. Another option is to offer *Ouch! That Stereotype Hurts* via eLearning and then bring people together for group discussion utilizing *Ouch! Your Silence Hurts* video-based workshop. Individual learning followed by group discussion reinforces the skills and motivation to speak up on behalf of respect in the face of stereotypes or other biased behaviors in the workplace.

- 4) **You have been communicating the message of *Ouch!* for over fifteen years. How has it evolved over that time period? What are some of the key concepts that remain constant?**

The times have changed, technology has changed, and the ways organizations deliver learning opportunities have changed. Through the four generations of *Ouch!* training – workshops, book,

video and now eLearning, the basic message of building an inclusive and respectful workplace has been the constant factor.

5) **As you continue your work in this area, what's on your mind at this point?**

There is a lot on my mind – why it's important to address stereotypes and demeaning comments early and when they are still small. These “little things” – the “micro-inequities” are cumulative and erode respect and self-esteem. Secondly, seemingly small actions, like stereotypical depictions of people, often lead to larger, more damaging actions, such as unfair performance evaluations and opportunities at work. Outside of work, demeaning jokes and comments can fuel prejudice, scapegoating, exclusion, discrimination and worse. Third, if you remain silent, it's often interpreted as agreement or support of the stereotype. And, finally, it's important to speak up early because it's easier. It's much more pleasant to say *“I'm sure you meant that to be funny, but that stereotype hurts”* than to discipline someone once things get out of hand.

Lately, it seems even more important to give feedback with kindness. We are all human. We all make mistakes. Yes, we are accountable for managing our own biases and behaviors. Yes, we need to give and receive feedback about the impact of our words and actions. And, yes, we can do so with compassion. There is no need to pounce on each other when one of us reveals a stereotype or a bias.

What do you see on the horizon? What's the next likely step in the journey of Ouch!?

We are currently developing a Spanish-language *Ouch!* eLearning program as well as a 508-compliant version so that individuals with various disabilities have full access to the learning experience. We also continue to develop new tools and resources to help individuals explore perception and biases, strengthen their ally skills, and make decisions that enable inclusive workplaces. Stay tuned.

The first time I was exposed to the “Ouch! That Stereotype Hurts” program, I really liked it. It's clear and straightforward. People connect with it easily and can relate to the messages it sends. It's an interactive, self-paced, 30-minute online learning experience that explores stereotypical comments and why people don't speak up against stereotypes and other biased or disparaging behaviors. Users learn six techniques for speaking up on behalf of respect. It includes a participant workbook and learning administrator's guide for implementing *Ouch!* eLearning in any organization.

We have all been on the receiving end of biases and stereotypes at some time in our lives and, unfortunately, we have all been guilty of stereotyping others to some degree. The subject is often awkward and difficult to address and Ouch provides some very specific techniques and suggestions to deal with stereotypes and bias in an honest and non-confrontational way. It is a very powerful tool that any organization can use to move towards creating an inclusive culture, and having an eLearning version provides yet another approach to increase its effectiveness. I highly recommend it!

Leslie Aguilar is a speaker, author and workshop facilitator in the areas of diversity, cultural competence, communication and service success in a diverse world, She founded International Training and Development, LLC, in 1992 and works with leading organizations throughout the country to help them tap the strength of their diverse workforces and provide exceptional service for multicultural and international customers.

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