

Book Synopsis on
“Ouch! That Stereotype Hurts”

by Leslie Aguilar

(Synopsis by Gary Tomlinson)
Women’s Edge – June 2008 Issue

“Have you ever heard someone say something biased or demeaning and you didn’t know whether to speak up? Have you ever said something unintentionally offensive and wished you could take it back? Would you like to know how to present information and lead discussions in ways that include everyone and avoid bias, stereotyping, discounting or potential discrimination?” If you’ve answered “yes” to any of these questions, *Ouch! That Stereotype Hurts* is the book and video for you.

People are naturally biased. We all have a tendency to let some of our biases slip into our conversations whether we do so consciously or unconsciously. When that happens, we all lose. Relationships can suffer, cooperation can decrease and our ability to lead or influence others can diminish. The great news is that Leslie Aguilar’s book, *Ouch! That Stereotype Hurts* can help us:

- Ensure our message gets across – while conveying respect for others.
- Gain insight into the impact of our language choices.
- Learn ways to successfully recover when we put our foot in our mouth.
- Speak up effectively if others stereotype or make biased or demeaning comments.
- Enhance our credibility and influence as a communicator.

Women’s Edge had the opportunity to speak with both the author, Leslie Aguilar and the executive producer from Learning Communications, Joel Marks.

W.E.: What inspired you to write this book? Was there a particular catalyst or event that was the tipping point?

Leslie: It actually began as a workshop. In 1996, a client company asked me to coach their team of trainers on how to model “valuing diversity” during training sessions. We focused on awareness and skills the facilitators would need to ensure the training message got across while modeling inclusion and respect for all audience members. Over 150 trainers and group facilitators completed the workshop. We then realized the importance of these skills for all leaders and communicators within the organization. That’s how the “Inclusive Communication”™ workshop was born and since then, over 5,000 individuals have participated in this training.

W.E.: How did the video come about?

Leslie: Nearly ten years after I began training in this area, I met Joel Marks, a longtime executive producer for training and educational films and videos. As a result of brainstorming with Joel, the idea of the *Ouch! That Stereotype Hurts* book and video-based training program emerged. Joel guided me through the creative process. He also brought together the teams to make it all possible. We worked with an outstanding producer, Joel Leskowitz of SunShower Learning and with Walk The Talk Company editor Steve Ventura. So, I owe thanks to a lot of people.

W.E.: As a result of writing this book, what have you learned personally?

Leslie: Over the years, I have been amazed to learn how many people sit silent in the face of stereotypes or other demeaning comments. Not because they agree, but simply because they are too uncomfortable to speak up, or just don't know how. This is why I chose Chapter Three from the book, "*Speaking Up Against Bias without Blame or Guilt*," as the focus for the video.

I've also learned that verbal disrespect is not just an interaction between two people – it's often a group event. The bystanders create the audience or the context for the demeaning joke, slur or statement. So, the bystander is an important player in the scene and he or she has a choice to make, which affects the outcome. The bystander can speak up or can silently collude. Silence is often interpreted as support.

W.E.: What feedback have you received from your readers?

Leslie: Overall, readers have given me very positive feedback and have thanked me for *Ouch! That Stereotype Hurts*. They share with me situations they are in or have been in and how the book has given them a way to approach conversations that previously they hesitated to discuss. I believe the message of respect and inclusion is reaching people at the right time.

Joel: Leslie's book and video has had such an incredible impact on people. It's powerful, personal and practical. The beginning of the video is very powerful. Her stories about people not speaking up, why they didn't and the impact it's had on them for not speaking up, is quite impactful. It's personal because it makes us that see we have a choice in these situations. That it is our responsibility to speak up. And it's practical because it gives valuable techniques that empower us to speak up without blaming or placing guilt on others.

W.E.: We're in the middle of an election year. How does *Ouch! That Stereotype Hurts* apply to this?

Leslie: I think election year is an interesting time to test ourselves for our own ability to communicate in respectful, non-biased ways, whether we agree or not with the person's viewpoint or political affiliation.

When I began writing *Ouch! That Stereotype Hurts* in 2005, I chose Senators Hillary Clinton and John McCain as an example of equitable treatment across genders. I had no way of knowing the two would emerge in the media spotlight during the presidential race. Nor that there would be so much political discussion in this country about racial, ethnic, religious, gender, or age diversity. I'm glad we are addressing important questions related to diversity and I believe it's possible to do so in a respectful, non-stereotypical way. We have a lot to learn in this regard.

W.E.: What are some key messages you want *Women's Edge* readers to take away from *Ouch! That Stereotype Hurts*?

Leslie: I want your readers to remember that one person taking action can inspire others to do the same. We can identify our own biases, explore ways to reduce them and work to communicate in more inclusive, bias-free ways. That's what this book and video are about. So I say, "Go ahead – Use your voice! Speak up on behalf of respect."

For more information about Leslie Aguilar or to order her book and/or video, visit www.thediversitycenter.com. For a complimentary online preview of the *Ouch! That Stereotype Hurts* video, go to www.ouchthatstereotypehurts.com. You can also learn more about this program by visiting www.learncom.com or call Learning Communications at (800) 622-3610.