

# Proceed until apprehended

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**IN TODAY'S TURBULENT, STRESSFUL,** and rapidly changing healthcare environment, we need leadership in every corner, not just in the corner office. "Proceed Until Apprehended" are the three most important words in my book, *The Florence Prescription*, because they encourage people at every level to think like leaders whether or not they have a management title.<sup>1</sup> Although there's no reason to believe that Florence Nightingale ever used these exact words, the phrase captures her commitment to always taking the initiative. In practical terms, Proceed Until Apprehended means three things:

**1) If something needs to be done, do it.** Nightingale transformed the human catastrophe she found at the Scutari Barrack Hospital into an efficient and high-quality healthcare operation by rolling up her sleeves and tackling problems head-on. In doing so, she created a blueprint for the hospital as we know it today. Virtually every nontechnology department in the modern medical center—including pharmacy, house-keeping, medical records, food service, supply chain, and patient experience—can trace its roots to Nightingale's innovations during the Crimean War.

**2) If you need help, ask for it.** The largest collection of letters in the British national library is that of Florence Nightingale.<sup>2</sup> In much of her correspondence, she was asking for help. She liberally asked for money, staff, supplies and equipment, political support, and whatever else she needed. When she was told no, she asked again or asked someone else, until she got the answer she wanted.

**3) If apprehended, plea bargain for a better solution.** Nightingale never considered "it's not in the budget" to be an acceptable response to her requests. If something could improve care for her soldiers, she worked around, or pushed through, every obstacle.

## MOVING FROM ACCOUNTABILITY TO OWNERSHIP

In my research for *How The DAISY Foundation has Influenced the Global Healthcare Landscape*, I read hundreds

of DAISY Award nominations.<sup>3</sup> Virtually without exception, nurses were nominated for having done something that isn't taught in nursing school, that wasn't in their job descriptions, and for which they couldn't have been held accountable had they not done it. A Proceed Until Apprehended philosophy encourages innovation, builds trust, fosters professional growth, and inspires teamwork. In addition to building a stronger culture, at the individual level this mindset helps people achieve personal goals by overcoming learned helplessness and imposter syndrome.

## PROMOTING JUST CULTURE

A Proceed Until Apprehended philosophy gives people the courage to report a medication error, call a time-out in the OR, or confront bullying behavior. For this reason, excessive focus on accountability can insidiously undermine the psychological safety required for just culture, which holds that problems with systems, culture, and technology should be evaluated before blaming individuals. But you can't hold systems, culture, or technology accountable for anything. As soon as the search for accountability begins, fingers start to point, causing anxiety that's toxic to initiative and innovation.

The best way I've found to promote a Proceed Until Apprehended mindset is to craft a written statement of cultural philosophy that reinforces core values and defines behavioral expectations. Then, in unit meetings and staff huddles, discuss the types of situations where people can assume they won't be apprehended and situations where they should ask for guidance before they proceed.

Proceed Until Apprehended is a framework for fostering a culture of ownership by trusting people to act in the best interests of the organization in ways that are consistent with its core values and guiding mission. More often than not, Proceed Until Apprehended is also the answer to the question "What would Florence do?". **NMI**

## References

1. Tye J. *The Florence Prescription: From Accountability to Ownership*. 4th ed. Solon, IA: Values Coach, Inc.; 2017.
2. McDonald L, ed. *Collected Works of Florence Nightingale*. Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press; 2001-2012.
3. Tye J. *How The DAISY Foundation Has Influenced the Global Healthcare Landscape*. 2nd ed. Solon, IA: Values Coach, Inc.; 2023.

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