



The Duplicitous Power of “They”: A Barrier to Unity and Progress in Nursing

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In everyday conversation, whether whispered in break rooms, muttered during meetings, or echoed in online forums, there lurks a deceptively simple word that carries profound weight: *they*. It slips off the tongue with ease, often cloaked in frustration or cynicism. *They don't care. They decided that without us. They never listen.*

But who exactly are “they”?

“They” is often not one and everyone. It can refer to leadership, administrators, peers, policymakers, or any group we feel disconnected from or in conflict with at a given moment. It's a convenient stand-in for complexity, a shortcut that externalizes blame and sidesteps responsibility. It creates a faceless adversary, allowing us to express dissatisfaction without engaging in solutions.

Yet the true power of “they” lies not in its vagueness, but in its divisiveness. It draws an invisible line between *us* and *them*, turning colleagues into combatants and teammates into targets. This division festers within organizations, professional associations, and communities undermining collaboration, eroding trust, and stalling progress.

In nursing and healthcare, where teamwork and shared purpose are vital, the damage is particularly acute. When frontline nurses speak of “they” in reference to management, or when leadership dismisses staff concerns as “their complaints,” we build silos of suspicion. We reduce individuals with real intentions and challenges into caricatures of indifference or incompetence. This kind of language not only dehumanizes but also depersonalizes, making dialogue and mutual understanding nearly impossible.

Worse still, “they” absolves *us* of responsibility. It allows us to disengage from the hard work of change. Rather than contributing to reforming systems, we resign ourselves to the myth that someone else is in charge and always doing it wrong. It's a subtle surrender, one that reinforces powerlessness while eroding collective accountability.

But there is a remedy

It begins with naming, not blaming. Replacing “they” with specifics. Who made the decision? Who was consulted, and who wasn't? What systems are broken, and what role do we each play in fixing them? Language that clarifies rather than clouds opens the door to honest dialogue and shared problem-solving. It allows for discomfort without deflection.

We must also embrace the humility to recognize that *we* are someone's “they.” As leaders, peers, or members of a community, our words and actions (or inactions) are interpreted through the same lens. By acknowledging our part in the dynamic, we transform the conversation from adversarial to collaborative.

In this moment, where trust in institutions is fragile and unity is desperately needed, we must reject the lazy villainy of “they.” Progress requires courage, transparency, and a commitment to seeing each other fully, not flattening others into enemies for rhetorical convenience.

If we truly believe in moving forward together, then it's time to retire the accusatory “they” from our lexicon of blame and replace it with dialogue, accountability, and shared vision. Only then can WE dismantle the walls that divide us and build the bridges that carry us forward. ■

A promotional graphic for the Florida Nurses Association. It features a woman with long brown hair, wearing a blue scrub top and a name tag, standing with her arms crossed. The background is a teal and blue geometric pattern. Text on the graphic includes: "The Power of Nurses" in large white letters, "Your Profession Your Association Your Voice" in smaller white letters, the Florida Nurses Association logo (a stylized flame) and name in the bottom left, and "Join Us Today www.floridanurse.org" in white text in the bottom right.

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