

STANDARD DEVIATIONS: Juggling Jelly Jars

Just look around,

Sometimes we have too much on our plates. And whether that is a metaphor for all the hoops we go through or all the loops we blow through depends on the cultures we're talking about.

But the approach to each problem is the same. We need to isolate the bothers that are bugging us or the bugs that are bothering us.

One thing at a time, one step at a time, one bug at a time. It's easy, on the bench, to be overwhelmed by the amount of work to be done. We emphasize turn-around times and through-put as evidence of productivity, but at what cost? In our line of work would you say it's quantity or quality that counts most? Does balancing the two lessen both? These are esoteric questions that are answered differently by different groups.

We know that there are some things we just can't rush. Blood culture bottles don't watch the clock. We should take a page from that book when working with infectious material. Proper identification requires precision and patience; so does safety.

Just as I'm using jelly jars as a metaphor for micro media plates, our patience with microbe growth can be a metaphor for working precisely and accurately everywhere in the lab. Universally, studies show that multi-tasking makes us less efficient at each task. And we accrue speed and proficiency through patient practice; like juggling.

This is simply a Monday morning reminder to work smart and work safe. Isolate the task at hand and make sure you identify what you're working on. Complication and confusion contaminate our competency.

Have a great week and be safe,

Bryan