STANDARD DEVIATIONS: Look, Ma! No Ropes!?

Greetings,

Are you comfortable with risk? Maybe it's that black diamond run you've wanted to ski. Maybe it's jumping out of planes. Maybe it's choosing the right cereal for the kids. For me, it's risky trying to separate clothes for the wash. The consequences of failure can be dire. Some thrive in that crucible.

On June3, 2017, Alex Honnold completed the first free solo climb of El Capitan (Yosemite NP), **without protective equipment**. He did it in just under 4 hours (the documentary, *Free Solo*, is an award-winning film that follows this climb).

{El Capitan is 3000 feet from base to summit}

30 others have died while climbing it, with protective equipment. I think we can agree that some risk is involved.

Is this guy a nut? Well, maybe, maybe not. For such a dangerous and scary endeavor, Honnold spent months researching the route, planning, training, and **assessing risk**. He had over 50 ascents of El Cap with ropes, partners, and an intimate familiarity with the climb's difficulties. Only after determining that his risk assessment and study had mitigated the dangers did he make his attempt. Practice, patience, study, and more practice, he committed every move to memory before trying the free solo. It took over a year of preparation to consider every possibility where the risk would be too extreme and had been addressed.

His success is related to following his established route exactly, without deviation. He had displayed competency and proficiency through years of experience and performance. In a dangerous situation, Honnold performed an extensive risk assessment and mitigated those risks through technical competence and a plan that covered every step.

Once he began his climb, even the difficult and strenuous sections were passed with ease.

{"I knew exactly what to do, and how to do it..."}

Now, **I'm not advocating working in a lab without protection!** What I'm getting at is that by becoming proficient and displaying competency, by doing risk assessments and mitigating those risks, and by following an SOP exactly, we make our work safer. We create confidence and a safer laboratory by adapting this behavior. Our lab PPE represents the climber's chalk bag and climbing shoes; necessary tools for doing the work properly. And that should always be safely.

Alex Honnold has a twelve minute TED talk found here: https://www.ted.com/talks/alex_honnold_how_i_climbed_a_3_000_foot_vertical_cliff_without_ropes

Have a great week and be safe,

Bryan