Microscopy Microanalysis

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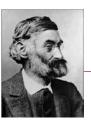
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DearAbbe

Dear Abbe.

A strange difficulty has arisen in our medical entomology lab. We need to cut sections of the larva of the South African minefly, Musca subterrae adamantivora. This is the vector of a viral infection of workers in our local diamond mines. The fly bites the miners and also bats infected from eating certain moths. The sectioning difficulty is due to the minefly larvae eating bat guano, which contains dust with microdiamonds stirred up by the mining. The largest of these diamonds is no bigger than a cell nucleus, but they concentrate in the tissue. These microdiamonds shred the sections and destroy our diamond knives. Even the hardest epoxy resins don't help. We have worn out more than 50 diamond knives trying to section these wretched little worms. Please make some suggestions. We have run out of ideas.

Baffled in Bloemfontein

Dear Baffled,

This is not a new problem. Many years ago in my impetuous youth (as opposed to my petuous old age), I was sent specimens of these very same minefly larvae. The senders didn't know why they couldn't section them. After some false starts, I discovered the source of woe and immediately requested several liters of larva and started harvesting tiny diamonds. Unlike some people who merely see a baffling conundrum, I saw sparkling opportunity! During an evening of notes on napkins and glasses of Liebfraumilch with Carl Fabergé, I conceived of invisibly small wires (it was not a difficult Ideegeburt) onto which I could mount the microdiamonds. Imagine the potential sales! Microscopic diamond rings, affordable to anyone. Immediately I saw the flaw: "affordable to anyone." At that time I was not the philanthropic misanthrope I am today, so I immediately burned my notes. If only I had kept the parts about making microscopic and submicroscopic wires!

Dear Abbe,

The provost of our institution makes us fill out a "Quarterly Federal Lobbying Disclosure Report," and I am not sure if I have interacted with a politician. Is there a way to tell if the people I work with or interact with daily are politicians?

Apolitical in Andover

Dear Apolitical,

Sometimes the difficult part of answering a question is not saying what I really think. So, my puzzled friend, we should refer to the famous lexicographer Herr Ambrose Bierce who noted that a politician is "an eel in the fundamental mud upon which the superstructure of organized society is reared. When he wriggles he mistakes the agitation of his tail for the trembling of the edifice. As compared with the statesman, he suffers the disadvantage of being alive." I couldn't have said better myself without using coarse language unsuitable for such a fine publication.

Lab mates bugging you? Need creative funding methods? Let Herr Abbe take a swat at those pesky problems for you. Send your queries to his minimally qualified assistant at jpshield@uga.edu.