

РЕКС БЛЕК



За то недолгое время, которое было отведено на интервью, наш арт-директор Антон Киселев сумел поговорить с Рексом Блеком о том, как тот пришел в тестирование и об идеальном тестировщике. Также были затронуты вопросы о нюансах коммуникаций, багах и будущем тестирования. Пожалуй, еще полчаса и они перешли бы к разработке плана по завоеванию мира. Полное интервью читайте далее. . .

With thirty years of software and systems engineering experience, Rex Black is President of RBCS (www.rbc-us.com), a leader in software, hardware, and systems testing. For almost twenty years, RBCS has delivered consulting, outsourcing and training services in the areas of software, hardware, and systems testing and quality. Employing the industry's most experienced and recognized consultants, RBCS conducts product testing, builds and improves testing groups, and provides testing staff for hundreds of clients worldwide. Ranging from Fortune 20 companies to startups, RBCS clients save time and money through higher quality, improved product development, decreased tech support calls, improved reputation, and more.

As the leader of RBCS, Rex is the most prolific author practicing in the field of software testing today. His popular first book, *Managing the Testing Process*, has sold over 50,000 cop-

ies around the world, including Japanese, Chinese, and Indian releases, and is now in its third edition. His ten other books on testing, *Advanced Software Testing: Volumes I, II, and III*, *Critical Testing Processes*, *Foundations of Software Testing*, *Pragmatic Software Testing*, *Fundamentos de Pruebas de Software*, *Testing Metrics*, *Improving the Testing Process*, and *Improving the Software Process* have also sold tens of thousands of copies, including Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, Hebrew, Hungarian, Indian, and Russian editions. He has written over forty articles, presented hundreds of papers, workshops, and seminars, and given about fifty keynotes and other speeches at conferences and events around the world.

Rex is the past President of the International Software Testing Qualifications Board and of the American Software Testing Qualifications Board.

TL: Mr. Black, can you please tell us why have you decided to work in QA area?

RB: I had worked as a programmer and system administrator for a number of years, and started working on doing test automation. I found I was good at it, and then expanded into test management.

TL: Do you remember the first bug you have found?

RB: It's just too many bugs ago. I find bugs all the time, even when I'm not looking for them!

TL: Which bug you have found was the funniest?

RB: My favorite recently was a bug on a package for a router which said "provides high quality of service". Of all the words to misspell...

TL: Please, tell us about the most comical moment at work

RB: I was sitting in a chair, one of those kinds that tilt backward, and having an argument with a vendor about their invoice to the test lab I was working for. They had overbilled us, and I was explaining why. Suddenly, the chair broke and I fell straight backward. I found myself still in the seat, laying on my back, in astronaut position, with the phone still to my ear. I realized how silly that must have looked from outside, so I decided to continue the conversation later.

TL: In your experience what was the maximum ratio of testers to programmers and which ratio was in average?

RB: I don't find these ratios very useful. I think discussing them is counter-productive and leads testers away from more rational ways to talk about test estimation.

TL: What do you think is better – when different iterations have been tested by the same person or by different ones?

RB: If we're talking about Agile projects, then what seems to work best is having testers assigned to Agile sprint teams for a long term, rather than rotated on and off on each iteration. The continuity of the tester on each team is valuable.

TL: Who is better and why: "I-can-do-everything" engineer or professional in some specific area?

RB: I think this depends on the product being tested, and the organization's needs. In some cases, we find our clients needing specialized test teams, while in others a more generalized team makes more sense. Specialization can be based on the business problem being solved, by the technology, or by the testing skills required. Many teams actually have a little of both: a generalized test team with specialists providing expertise in particular areas. I discussed this topic at length in my book, **Managing the Testing Process, 3e**.

TL: Do you have a pool of experienced QA engineers who you know and call to take part in the projects when needed or do you create a team from scratch every time?

RB: We have a team of people that we use on our projects, but I will also pull in people as needed, too.

TL: Do you work with freelancers / outsource? Have you run into any problems and how have you overcome them?

RB: Outsource testing does pose a number of challenges for both the test team and the outsource testing service pro-

viders. I've done a couple webinars on this topic, too, which can also be found in the RBCS Digital Library.

TL: Have you ever worked with development / QA team from Russia / CIS? If so – what would you say about our specialists?

RB: Other than training and conference presentations, no.

TL: What would you advise to do in order not to work round the clock on a project?

RB: First, decide not to. It took me about 25 years to learn how to do that, and I'm still learning. Then, once you decide to work reasonable hours, be clear-eyed and totally objective in your decisions about what not to work on.

TL: What was and is the most complicated for you in team communication?

RB: Communicating the value of testing to senior and executive management is a major challenge for test managers. Communicating bad news about the product being tested to fellow project stakeholders and participants is also a major challenge for many test managers.

TL: How do you explain to management that QA is indeed important, should be seriously taken into account and paid required attention to? Can you please share some examples from your experience?

RB: There are a couple main dimensions to achieving relevance. One is a matter of defining the objectives, and metrics for success, as discussed above. Another is a matter of defining the return on the testing investment, which is often done via cost of quality. I have done a couple webinars on these topics, and you can find the recorded versions of those webinars on the RBCS Digital Library.

TL: How to convince management that additional people resource won't reduce the time spent for certain testing tasks (9-month rule)?

RB: I'd refer people back to my webinar on test estimation, where I address this question.

TL: Have you ever had an experience when you have worked at one company as SQA engineer having a certain set of job responsibilities and then you have moved to another company for the same position but job responsibilities have been totally different? What – in your opinion – should be included in SQA engineer's job responsibilities? What should not?

RB: Yes, test teams across the industry and profession do tend to have different missions, objectives, and metrics for success. That is all fine, provided that the missions, objectives, and metrics are agreed upon by all the testing stakeholders. Four typical objectives for test teams are:

- Finding defects, especially important defects.
- Reducing risk to an acceptable level prior to release.
- Build confidence in the testing and, if the test results justify it, build confidence in the product.
- Providing information to allow informed release decisions.

These objectives need to be refined with the testing stakeholders, and appropriate metrics for success defined for each metrics.

TL: Have you come across the case when minor process change has significantly increased productivity of the department of the whole project team?

RB: Yes, it's possible that minor process changes can have significant effects.

TL: Which projects V-model is the most applicable for? In your opinion, what is necessary ratio developer / QA engineer in V-model?

RB: I don't consider developer/tester ratios to be a valid way of estimating test effort. I did a webinar on this topic, too, which you can also find on the RBCS Digital Library.

TL: Which development module do you prefer and why?

RB: I have no preference, just that some model exist and be applied with discipline. Testers must be able to play the hand they are dealt, and that includes the choice of development model.

TL: How will testing change in the future decade? How do you think – in which direction is the process of testing going: towards increasing the complexity of hierarchy and documentation or towards simplicity and minimization of those?

RB: The considerations listed above will have profound effects on testing over the next decade. The question of documentation is really more of a tactical one, that is influenced by these considerations.

TL: In your book "Critical Testing Processes. Plan, Prepare, Perform, Perfect" you are talking about three categories of people who are the best to be junior QA

engineers. None of those categories has any relation to testing though. How is it possible to guarantee that resources spent on educating junior QA engineers won't be a waste of time? For instance, when young specialists will become more knowledgeable and experienced, they can be hunted by competitors. Won't the company having such practice (grow junior specialists to the higher level) serve as a kindergarten for other companies?

RB: If a company is experiencing excessive turnover, it should look to its management, human resources, salary, and career growth practices. When a company decides to retard the skills growth of its people in order to prevent them from leaving, that is one of the most profoundly dysfunctional decisions a company can make.

TL: Which questions do you typically ask on staff interviews?

RB: One of my favorites is, "What do you like about being a tester?" I've eliminated a lot of potentially-problematic testers with that question.

TL: How did you avoid QA engineers' weariness on the project? What are the most successful ways to keep specialists' motivation?

RB: This requires a detailed answer, and, in the interest of brevity, I'd refer people to my book **Managing the Testing Process, 3e**, where I spend most of a chapter discussing the topic.

TL: Which book from recently read you endorse and would recommend?

RB: Well, as the author of eleven books, I'd recommend one of mine. :-)

TL: Which book do you consider as the best resource for a beginner to learn risk management? Who from the development process participants will be the most successful candidate to estimate project risks?

RB: I am partial to my own books: **Managing the Testing Process, 3e**, **Pragmatic Software Testing**, and **Advanced Software Testing: Volume 2**. As for the participants, the testing and quality stakeholders, both business and technical stakeholders, must be involved in the process. The proper choice of participants is the most important success criterion for risk-based testing.

TL: Which non-professional book is relevant to testing in your opinion?

RB: Books on psychology can be useful, because it helps you understand how people think. **Thinking Fast and Slow** is a recent good read. Also, **Quiet** is a good read if you work with introverts.

TL: What should 'QA engineer of the next decade' know and be able to do?

RB: I think there are a number of important things for testers to consider for the coming years:

- Virtualization and cloud computing are having a significant effect on the cost and speed with which test environments can be acquired and configured.
- Agile methodologies are changing the way software is built, and even organizations that are not adopting Agile are often adopting some Agile ideas.
- An explosion of different platforms and operating systems has made the test configuration space much larger.
- The huge volume of production data for testing.
- The massive proliferation of relatively high-quality (especially given the price) open-source testing tools.
- It's important that testers have skills and awareness of these areas to be effective and efficient.

TL: Would you like to advise something to your colleagues experienced in QA?

RB: If someone has strong experience in QA, but not so strong in technology, get more technical.

TL: And what to newbies?

RB: Get ISTQB certified.

TL: Will new tutorials be available for preparation to ISTQB – Advanced Level?

RB: Yes. We (RBCS) already have accredited Advanced training courses, for all three modules, as well as compatible e-learning courses.

TL: What is your credo?

RB: I don't really have a credo. I'm more of a pragmatic than a philosophical person.

TL: Which plans do you have for the nearest future?

RB: Work hard. Live happily. I try to balance those two things and achieve both. The first is easier. TL