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## **A Career Quest** *Ross Collard*

Are software testing practices effective?

To use the tester's infamous answer: "It depends."

My guess is that 65 percent of knowledgeable practitioners assess current practices as mediocre, with 25 percent more assessing it as negative, leaving a fringe of optimists. The reasons are many, have been listed before, and encourage debate about "how good is good enough?" Let's look at hiring and career development as an assumed bellwether for all testing practices. Usually omitted from test practices lists, this area might not measure the overall state of testing, but it surely constrains its effectiveness.

To overgeneralize, the practice in these areas is often mediocre. A recent job ad listed these required skills:

LoadRunner, Java, XML, WebSphere, Oracle, UML. Their relationship to testing is unclear.

I suppose that skepticism, perseverance, clear thinking, and attention to detail are assumed or too amorphous for a job listing. External perceptions of testing's value are mixed. Most people still enter the field accidentally. Test jobs are often consolation prizes for those not considered good enough to hire as software engineers, and the salary gap between developers and testers remains significant. Testers frequently complain about lack of respect, credibility, and influence. Career development is more haphazard than strategic. Most testers are self-taught, and many have never read a book on the subject. No universally agreed-on terminology and testing body of knowledge exist. University training is widely second-rate. Major test certification programs could endanger testing's future by focusing on the wrong things.

So would you recommend a testing career to young people? I would.

Why? Many testers love the work and wouldn't trade their careers for anything. Despite (or perhaps because of) the complications and misperceptions, testers have unusually strong opportunities to contribute to a society that increasingly depends on reliable software. Effective testing is a quest and, like any quest, includes intellectual challenge, passionate debate, and the excitement of discovery. Rewards for the best 20 percent of testers typically include exponential career growth, substantial monetary compensation, and wide influence. There is plenty of room for more good testers.

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