QA Authority:
From Zero to Hero

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Abstract

In the modern world some people hold the opinion that Quality Assurance Specialists are not 'real' IT professionals, and could be carried out by anyone, without any specific training or experience. These views are often based on a misunderstanding of what QA actually does and the value that QA brings to projects.

In my presentation, I will explore the reasons for such misunderstandings and present strategies that will help QA specialists increase their authority and influence within the team and project. We will discuss methods of effective communication with other team members, demonstrating the value of your work, and ways to participate in development processes to become an indispensable team member.

Biography

Anton Bolotin has over 7 years of experience as a QA and Scrum Master. He has extensive experience with manual testing, automation, load testing, and security. He has implemented new features in testing projects, built processes from scratch, and managed teams of up to 8 people. He currently works as a QA specialist and mentor, and he also manages his own projects.

Introduction

Have you ever experienced toxicity or lack of respect from coworkers because you work as a QA? Well, in my experience I can tell you that unfortunately this happens quite often.

We were all once at the beginning of our careers and were excited to see the world of IT, where specialists of different profiles come together in teams and create new amazing products. Product managers, designers, developers, analysts and of course QA specialists.
A good team and colleagues are often an important factor that can keep employees from leaving a company if other factors, such as salary, do not satisfy the employee.

I have been working in QA for a long time and giving personal consultations for a while now. During this time, I have talked to a great number of people: those who just wanted to step on the path of a quality assurance specialist, those who were already actively working in this profession, and those who for various reasons stopped working as QA. And, of course, I asked them about the processes in the company, relationships with colleagues, and in general about their experience of working in different teams.

Here are a few situations and statements that many QA professionals I know have faced

- "Testing is the easiest field in IT, anyone can get in"

- "Testers are not programmers; they don't write code."

- "Testers don't know anything except how to push buttons and make regressions testing."

- "Monkey tester"

- "Automation tests are fake; they are not useful."

- "QA's opinion is not counted in team meetings."

- "QA has no authority in the team to push their ideas."

In this paper, we will look at some of the challenges that QA professionals face that downplay the importance of their work, and ten key things that they can do to showcase the value they bring to their teams.

What to do?

To understand how to fix a problem, you must first understand what caused it.

Let's take a look at:

- what is the reason for such attitude

- what can be done about it

- how to gain the respect of your teammates

I decided to explore the problem a little deeper and look at it from a different perspective. To do this, I have talked to developers, analysts and managers of various companies about their experience of working and interacting with testers.

Most of them evaluated the experience of interaction with testers in their teams as positive. However there was also a place for negative experience of working with some QA specialists. What could be the reason for this?

As a result of the research I made the following conclusions

Reasons

- Your colleagues don't see the results of your work.

- That doesn't mean you're not doing a good job

- It means you need visualization and transparency.

- Achievements of programmers are very visible - a feature implemented, a bug fixed, a new toolkit that speeds up the work of the team.

- QA has some different working artifacts that are not always visible to others.

Solution

Here are ten key things that QA professionals can do, to help raise the profile of their work within their teams, and to showcase and demonstrate the value that they bring to their projects.

1 Ask your teammates to help you with QA process improvement.

Taking care of product quality is not something that should rest solely on the shoulders of QA specialists. While QA teams are responsible for identifying bugs and ensuring product quality, quality assurance is ultimately a team effort. Every member of the team has a role to play in delivering a high-quality product, and involving others in the improvement of QA processes not only enhances the end result but also increases collaboration and mutual understanding among team members. When everyone shares the responsibility for quality, it becomes easier to achieve the desired outcome: a stable, well-functioning product.

Creating opportunities for teammates to contribute to quality improvements helps build a sense of ownership. When developers, analysts, and other stakeholders are involved, they see firsthand how their roles directly impact quality. This engagement shifts the perception of QA from being seen as a bottleneck or afterthought to being viewed as an integral part of product development.

- **Analysts**: Ask analysts to review your test cases. Their perspective can bring clarity to test coverage and help identify areas that need more thorough testing. Analysts work closely with business requirements, so their feedback ensures that the QA process aligns with end-user expectations. This will ensure that tests focus on the most critical business logic and cover edge cases that may not be obvious at first glance.

- **Backend developers**: Engage backend developers to create or modify tools that help generate test data more efficiently. By collaborating with them, you can ensure that complex datasets or difficult-to-manage test environments are automated or simplified. For example, they can develop scripts that generate predefined data sets or mock services that mirror real production behavior. This not only speeds up the testing process but also reduces the risk of inconsistencies and human error when preparing data manually.

- **Frontend developers**: Collaborate with frontend developers to add test IDs to UI elements, making it easier to write and maintain automated tests. Without proper identifiers, tests can become fragile and hard to manage as the UI evolves. By incorporating test-friendly code (such as unique IDs or data attributes), frontend developers contribute directly to making automated testing more efficient, reliable, and easier to debug.

As a result, it will help your colleagues understand the complexity and challenges QA teams face, increase empathy and collaboration, and help make your performance more transparent to your colleagues.
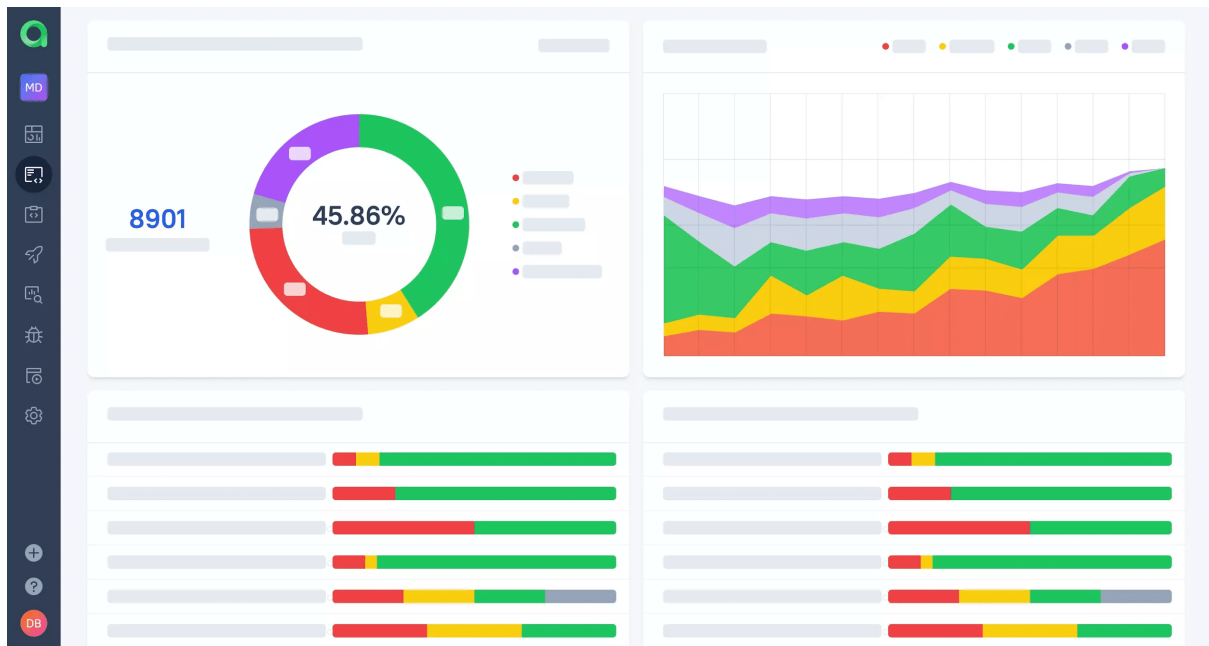
2 Visualize the results of your work. Dashboards

One of the most effective ways to demonstrate the value of QA work and increase transparency within the team is through the use of visual dashboards. Dashboards provide a clear, real-time view of the

current state of testing and quality assurance efforts, allowing both QA teams and other stakeholders to quickly understand progress and identify potential issues.

Built-in tools in test management systems make it easy to create these dashboards. You can track important metrics such as the number of active defects, test pass rate, test case execution progress, and the number of days left until the release.

Creating a dashboard that is regularly updated and accessible to your colleagues allows them to follow the progress in real time. Stakeholders from product management to development will appreciate the transparency and the ability to assess risks and plan their tasks more effectively based on up-to-date testing data

3 Test Automation

Start writing automation tests.

Starting with test automation can be a game-changer for your role as a QA specialist. The moment you begin writing automated tests, you elevate your status within the team and position yourself as a more versatile expert, as someone who is not only testing but also contributing directly to the development process through coding.

The secret is that it is not as hard as it seems at first sight. There are many test automation frameworks that work on the principle of Record and Play, which are ideal for beginners or those without extensive coding skills. For examples Selenium IDE, Testim, and Katalon Studio. These tools allow you to create automated tests through a simple point-and-click interface, making them accessible to a wide range of professionals.
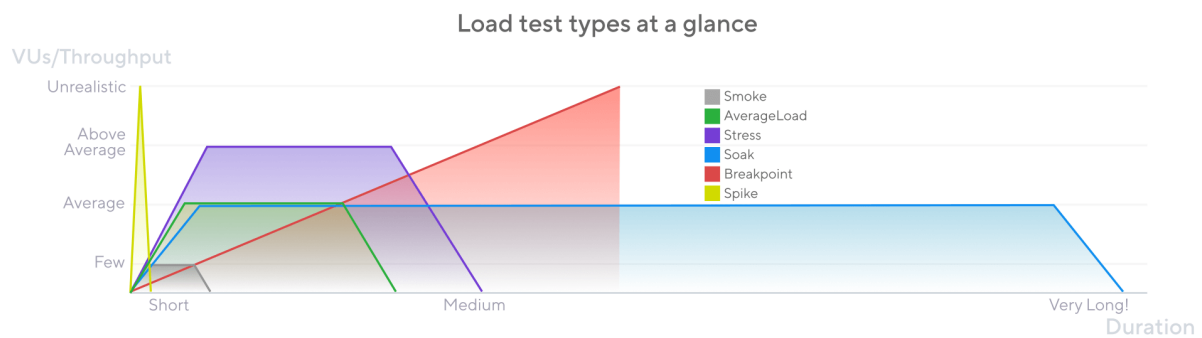
For QA specialists with coding experience, more advanced frameworks like Playwright, Selenium WebDriver and Cypress offer greater flexibility and control. These tools enable the creation of complex, highly customized tests, often required in larger or more sophisticated testing environments.

And the best way is teaming up with developers to think about what tool, language and framework to implement. Often it's beneficial to choose the same language as the developers are using, as they can then help troubleshoot any issues you might have, and they can also step in and write test cases.

And remember, you can always ask ChatGPT to help you navigate through any challenges you encounter while setting up or using these frameworks.
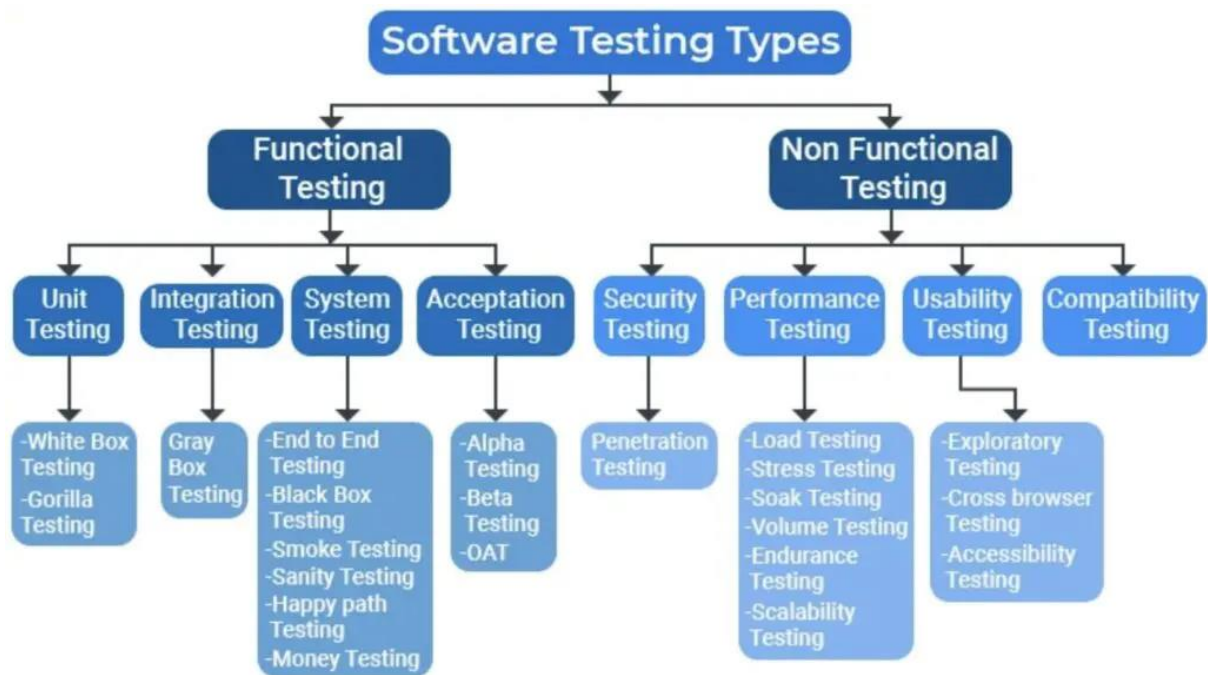
4 Performance Testing

If you have already started doing test automation, you can also try to initiate load testing on the project. After all, a tester who does not only manual testing, but also automation and load testing, definitely earns respect.

One of the most popular tools for load testing is Apache jMeter. It's a powerful tool that allows you to simulate multiple users interacting with your application to assess its performance under load. To get started, you might use Official jMeter Documentation: A great place to start, offering comprehensive guides on installation, setup, and basic test creation. But that's not the easiest way, so let's look at some other options.

5 Other types of testing

Start other types of testing on the project. For example, Security testing: you can introduce security checklist checks at each release or testing of documentation, design, cross-browser testing, and accessibility testing.

Accessibility testing is becoming increasingly important to ensure that your application is usable by people with disabilities. There are many freely available tools to help you get started with accessibility testing:

● Axe by Deque: A powerful and easy-to-use browser extension that automatically identifies accessibility issues on web pages.

● WAVE by WebAIM: Another browser extension that provides visual feedback about the accessibility of your web content.

● Lighthouse: A built-in tool in Google Chrome's DevTools that includes an accessibility audit feature.

Incorporating these types of testing into your project not only broadens your testing coverage but also helps in building a more robust and user-friendly product.

6 New tools

Introducing new tools to your team can greatly improve efficiency and enhance your role as a QA expert. By selecting the right tool for a specific need, you not only optimize your own workflow but also offer benefits to the entire team. One powerful way to make an impact is by implementing a Test Management System for writing and storing test cases, moving away from less structured options like

Google Docs or spreadsheets. A dedicated tool will help you organize test cases, track execution, and report results more effectively, ensuring nothing falls through the cracks.

If your team already uses a task tracker like Jira, there are many plugins and integrations that can be added from its library. For example, plugins like Xray or Zephyr can help manage test cases within Jira, linking them directly to user stories and issues. This allows for better tracking of test coverage, defect trends, and overall project health.

Another innovative tool to consider is GitHub Copilot, an AI-based code completion tool that helps automate repetitive tasks in code writing. If your work involves writing automation scripts, Copilot can significantly speed up the process by suggesting code snippets, helping you debug, and providing quick solutions to common problems. Sharing these capabilities with your team will likely spark interest and curiosity, as many of your colleagues may want to leverage the tool for their own coding tasks.

Implementing new tools not only improves your work but also positions you as a forward-thinking professional who is committed to continuous improvement. Sharing your experience with these tools will encourage your teammates to embrace new technologies and support a culture of innovation within the team.

What tools do you use to store test cases?

42%	33%	27%	9%
Office documents	I don't use any specific tools	Special test case management tools	Other

The State of Developer Ecosystem 2023 - Testing
Source: https://www.jetbrains.com/lp/devecosystem-2023/

7 Create your own meetings and showcases

If you find that existing meetings or calls are not allowing you to identify how to contribute, why not take the initiative and organize your own meetings dedicated to QA topics? This can be a great way to share your expertise, engage your colleagues, and increase QA visibility within the team. Here are some ways to do this effectively:

- **Plan a meeting on quarterly testing goals:** Set up a session to discuss the testing strategy and objectives for the upcoming quarter. This will give everyone a clear understanding of how QA efforts align with broader business goals and project timelines. It also allows you to collaborate with your colleagues on prioritizing features, test coverage, and potential risks.

- **Conduct training sessions:** Host a workshop or training session for your colleagues on the fundamentals of QA or on using specific QA tools. This can be particularly helpful for non-QA team members, such as developers or product managers, who may not be familiar with the intricacies of testing. Training can also cover topics like automated testing, test case management, or defect reporting.

- **Organize a testing showcase:** Hold a quarterly or bi-annual meeting where you present key testing achievements, such as defects discovered, challenging scenarios, or important metrics that show progress and areas for improvement. By showcasing your work, you highlight the importance of QA and provide the team with a clear understanding of the value it brings to the project.

Taking the initiative to organize these meetings not only showcases your leadership and communication skills, but it also helps to create a more collaborative, transparent environment.
I once saw a situation where the morale of an entire department was low, so I organized a department retro in the form of a game. The result was not only a great boost to the team's energy but also an unexpected improvement in my performance review score. This goes to show that even informal, creative meetings can have a significant impact.

8 Conferences and meetups

Attending conferences and meetups is an excellent way to stay updated on industry trends, connect with professionals, and expand your knowledge base. There are two main ways you can leverage these events to benefit both yourself and your team

Easy way: Go to a conference or meetup as a listener and absorb new ideas, insights, and best practices. After attending, prepare a presentation or informal discussion to share what you learned with your colleagues. This allows your team to benefit from your experience, even if they weren't able to attend the event themselves.

Cool way: For an even bigger impact, consider attending a conference or meetup as a speaker. Presenting your own experiences, challenges, or success stories not only raises your professional profile but also positions you as an expert in your field. Afterward, share your speaking experience with your colleagues.

Whether as a listener or a speaker, engaging with the QA community through conferences and meetups enhances your skill set and can motivate your colleagues to take similar steps toward professional development.

9 Became Scrum master

A story from personal experience. At one of my jobs, we worked in Scrum. And we had a special role of Scrum Master, which could be combined by any member of the team. So, I became a Scrum Master in the team, combining the main role of QA. And somehow, I got more authority in the team, becoming the second after the team leader and having a huge opportunity to influence the team's decisions and changes in the processes. A little bit off the Scrum way, but just know that there is such a way too and it works. And what to do with authority and the ability to influence - everyone must decide for themselves.

If you're interested in learning how to become a Scrum Master, here are some starting points that might be helpful:

- Scrum.org offers the Professional Scrum Master (PSM) certification, which includes a variety of training materials and practice assessments.

- Coursera has courses like "Introduction to Agile Development and Scrum" by IBM, which provides a solid foundation in Scrum practices.

- Scrum Alliance provides a well-recognized Certified ScrumMaster (CSM) course that combines theoretical knowledge with practical exercises.

These resources can help you gain the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively step into the role of a Scrum Master and leverage your influence within the team.

10 Be yourself

Throughout this paper, I have offered various advice on how to demonstrate your value as a QA professional and gain authority among your colleagues. The goal was to highlight how many opportunities in QA that you can explore if you are passionate about it.

Feel free to take and apply any of these approaches if they fit your situation. However, it is important to remember that none of this advice is mandatory. You are already a professional with your own unique skills and contributions.

After all, the best approach is to simply be yourself.

Conclusion

In the journey of working as a QA specialist, you may encounter challenges related to how others perceive your role. However, by implementing the strategies discussed you can build stronger relationships and influence within your team.

I hope that my advice helps you navigate your journey in QA with greater confidence and effectiveness.