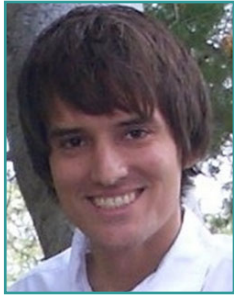




TECH STAR



Techie Star: Rob Walling

[By Akbar Ali]

Rob Walling is a software developer who possesses a wide range of technology experience, head of The Numa Group (www.thenumagroup.com), a .Net development firm working for clients all around the country, and the author of an extensive technology blog, *Software by Rob* (www.softwarebyrob.com), which is read by more than 25,000 monthly readers.

Rob has been programming since the age of eight, when he and his brother received an Apple IIe computer for Christmas from their father. He recalled, "We built tons of text-based games, and the thrill of creation was instilled in us at an early age." But it wasn't until much later in life-during the dot-com boom of the late '90s, to be precise-that he actively considered a career in programming.

At the University of California, Davis, Rob immersed himself in a formidable double major in computer engineering and electrical engineering. He had decided, early on, that he did not want to pursue programming; in fact, after his C++ (mid-level programming) class, he swore he would never write code again.

After graduation, he landed a day job as an executive trainee with a multimillion-dollar firm, where he initially planned to work up to CEO. At night, however, he was busy with a second career: teaching himself computer applications such as Perl and HTML, not out of ambition or need, but purely for entertainment. Watching his friends enjoying work at technology companies where the environment was, to put it mildly, unorthodox (daily water-gun fights, free lunches, and 25-year-old CEOs), brought him to the realization that he was in the wrong line of work. The time was ripe for changes, BIG changes.

He left his job and moved to Sacramento, where he began writing software for a dot-com company. Within three months, he was running multiple project teams. Though

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. I play the guitar, hang out with my wife and son, and watch films-mostly documentaries and independent films.

Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?

A. I've been listening to Josh Radin's *We Were Here*. I also saw the Counting Crows in concert last weekend.

Q. What is the last magazine you read?

A. *Money Magazine's* most-recent issue that talks about the best places to live in the U.S. I've never lived in any of them. I also read *Business 2.0* cover to cover each month.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. My favorite TV show of all time is *The West Wing*. My favorite show still on TV is a tie between *Lost* and *Scrubs*.

Q. Who is your role model?

A. I mentioned him as one of my mentors: Gene Ravizza. His life is governed by ethics, a sense of family, and empathy, yet he thrived in one of the most-cutthroat industries in the country. If I could accomplish one-tenth of the good he did in his life, I would be a happy man.

the work was fast paced, it provided Rob with tremendous satisfaction. From there, he transitioned into contracting, which he did for three years before becoming the application-development and database supervisor for the city of Pasadena. In this new position, he oversaw a team of 10 developers and database administrators. Despite the fact that it was high-profile job with an impressive salary, it turned out to be little more than an exercise in tedious management of a reluctant and difficult group of employees.

He then worked for a financial-services company as senior developer, managing a team of program developers undertaking the largest software project in the company's history. A recurring theme in Rob's work experience is that he likes managing small teams with big goals, and this ultimately drove him to create The Numa Group, the .NET consulting firm where he now serves, in his own words, as "owner, senior developer, and chief code monkey."

Among Rob's most-memorable career accomplishments is surviving the now-infamous burst of the dot-com boom of the late '90s: the consulting firm he was working for in 2001 was on the brink of collapse when, in order to keep the company solvent, three of its 15 programmers were retained on a contractor basis. Rob was one of them, which provided him with an important lesson: "I learned that hard times will come, but if you're one of the best, you will be able to find work." Fresh out of college, he was also project manager for the construction of



TECH STAR

Cupertino Electric's corporate headquarters, which, in spite of its considerable responsibility and demands, left him with little sense of satisfaction and propelled him toward writing code.

Another difficult but important learning experience came after he built a content-management system for a client who never read the detailed spec Rob had prepared but signed off on it anyway. When it launched, the client was livid at how difficult the site was to manage. "He expected a web-based application as easy to use as FrontPage (nay, easier), which in 2001 would have been ridiculously expensive to build—far more than our budget." The difficulty Rob experienced with this client made him realize that "managing expectations is far more important than building a good piece of software."

Among those whom Rob credits with guiding him toward success is Gene Ravizza, a man whose claim to fame is turning an electrical-contracting firm he purchased in 1954 for \$12,500 into the seventh-largest

electrical contractor in the nation. Rob trained under him for a year after college and said that under Ravizza's supervision, "I learned more about business and people in one week than I had in my previous five years at college." Also influential has been a technical lead named Rick Kopitzke. As one of the best data modelers Rob has come across, Kopitzke taught him that it's better to maintain composure in difficult situations, that troubleshooting is more about finding the answer than knowing it, and that becoming an expert in any field takes years of practice and discipline. Rob also credits his business-savvy father, not only for that first computer, but for offering "brilliantly simple" solutions to his frequently labored explanations of business challenges.

For those eager to find success in the ultra-competitive world of technology, Rob offered two pieces of advice: "Take risks now, and have an unending thirst for knowledge." He said that although it never seems like the right move to join a startup for virtually no pay, it pays to do so early on, before the personal responsibilities of relationships

or children may hold you back. "Don't wait until you've learned another programming language or until you have experience in the industry. By then you won't have the time or flexibility to take some of the risks that might bring you the most reward."

As for craving knowledge, he said, "The best developers I've known never stop learning. In my early days of programming, I read at least one technical book per week. If I wasn't learning a new technology, I was reading about project management, marketing, estimation, or writing smarter code. I've seen this same pattern over and over with successful developers—a library of books, a posture of learning, and an unquenchable thirst for knowledge about our field (both the technology and the human aspects). If you want to be the best, read every book about software development you can find, ask tons of questions, and always be searching for how to improve your solution to a problem."

EmploymentCrossing is the largest collection of active jobs in the world.

We continuously monitor the hiring needs of more than 250,000 employers, including virtually every corporation and organization in the United States. We do not charge employers to post their jobs and we aggressively contact and investigate thousands of employers each day to learn of new positions. No one works harder than EmploymentCrossing.

Let EmploymentCrossing go to work for you.