

The following is a review of James Bullock and Brian Branagan's talk titled "The Three R's of Software Testing" presented at [QA SIG](#) on January 14, 2004.

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Jim Bullock (a software development consultant) and Brian Branagan (QA Director for Getty Images) delivered QA SIG's first interactive presentation on Wednesday night at Quardev's Seattle lab to a packed crowd of 40. Instead of just a lecture and slides, Jim and Brian also led two simple exercises where attendees gathered and talked for a few minutes to relate incidents and examples where they've felt resignation, resentment, or righteousness in their careers.

It is Jim and Brian's researched opinion that these "little r's" carry somatic side effects that manifest in the body as stress, illness, fear, and anxiety -- which are decidedly *un*productive. For example, at the end of the day, your boss tells you to read and comment on a 1000-page manual you've never seen and suggest changes by tomorrow. This event can trigger all 3 r's immediately. Resignation, upon feeling that you have no choice, resentment at being handed this impossible task, and righteousness that your boss was inconsiderate or naive enough to think that anyone in their right mind could accomplish such a thing at such short notice. You leave either with or without the heavy briefcase tucked under your arm, feeling overwhelmed, exhausted and hopeless.

And since these feelings often lead to a conflict -- if not with the boss, then in yourself -- the stage is set for a possible meltdown.

Brian and Jim's antidote for these feelings is to be aware of the physical signals that accompany these three "little r's" and take measures to counter them. For example, if you feel tightness in your chest, to stretch; if you're weak in the knees with nervousness, sit down; if your boss is hovering over you in your chair, stand up; if you're feeling pushed against the wall, push back with a counter offer.

The antidote also carries 3 choices when you've recognized what natural but "unproductive" feelings to which you're susceptible. The choice takes the form of what Jim and Brian call the three "big R's" -- Resolve, Responsibility, and Respect. In the example above, it would look like this:

- 1) Choose to resolve (or rather re-solve) the problem with a counter-offer to your boss... what feedback is really needed? are you free to delegate? are there critical sections that need coverage and others that can wait?
- 2) Choose to take responsibility for how you're feeling: address your physical needs (like breathing deep and talking a walk to counter the stress of such an endeavor and the fear of being fired if you don't comply), but also think, what contribution *can* you make in that time?
- 3) Respect your boundaries, but is there a way to also respect the wish of the boss by understanding why the request is being made or by thinking what you would do if the roles were reversed? This can lead to empathy instead of defensiveness.

In my opinion, Jim and Brian have a very profound tool that helped several of the software professionals who gathered last night at the lab. Never have I seen such quick response to Jim and Brian's invitation to the crowd to gather for a few minutes to vent their vexing problems at work or tell their favorite project war stories.

Because humanity is too often ignored or forgotten on the job, I think a lot of us have trained ourselves to dismiss it entirely. We chalk it up as simple job stress. But the software business is just as human as it is technical, and conflicts arise every day that never get exposed or addressed in a way that both parties feel good about. By practicing awareness of how we're feeling in the moment and especially when we're feeling resignation, resentment, and righteousness can we even **begin** to think of how to move into Resolve, Responsibility and Respect.

Moving into these three "big R's" means being more productive, which doesn't mean giving your soul to a company so it can sell more widgets, but taking care of yourself and handling conflict gracefully rather than in a stony, determined, and angry defense.