SAIT Podcast: RPA (Robotic Process Automation) Episode 1

ANNCR: The Best Careers You Never Knew Existed podcast, sparked by SAIT, the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, and co-hosted by CITI, Careers in Tech Innovation, the podcast that helps you navigate jobs in Alberta's emerging and exciting economy. Learn about careers like UX designer, robotic process automation, and international kitten cuddler. Not the last one, but you get the picture. By talking with experts, leaders, and those who have done the journey in Alberta's emerging landscape, we'll provide the insight you need to expand into a new career.

ZACH: Hi, I'm ZACH.

LORA: And I am LORA.

ZACH: And we are from the podcast: The Best Careers You Never Knew Existed. This is our first podcast, and we're talking about RPA, or robotic process automation. And I must be honest, I hadn't heard about this until Lora told me more about it, so Lora's going to tell us a little bit more about the backstory of RPA and what we're talking about today.

LORA: We got really excited about RPA, not because it's about robots, but because it's transforming a lot of industries right now in terms of automating processes that are just routine work and not that much fun at all. I met Matt through an RPA user group, and he had made a career pivot from being a production accountant and basically self-taught himself to become an RPA developer. He now leads a team, teaches at our bootcamp, and is just an overall nice guy. I'm excited to talk to him today, but I'm curious about where he sees career opportunities with RPA.

ZACH: Hope you enjoy the conversation.

ANNCR: Now, here is a career you never knew existed.

LORA: So, thanks so much for coming. Matt, can I ask you to introduce yourself?

MATT: Yeah, I'm happy to be here. Hi, my name is Matthew Sentes. I am currently a lead RPA developer at ATCO. I was also involved with the SAIT RPA bootcamp, building that curriculum. And I'm also an instructor at the SAIT Bootcamp.

LORA: Matt, I'm so excited to chat with you today. I really wanted to name this podcast Robot Overlord. But I know that's not actually what you do. Do you mind telling us a little bit about what an RPA developer is like and what RPA is?

MATT: Yes, certainly, we get that question a lot. You hear RPA and you're like, "What is RPA?" I get that all the time. And RPA stands for Robotic Process Automation. Typically, what an RPA developer does is use the computer application to mimic keyboard strokes and mouse movements that another individual will do on their computer, such as data migration or certain

tasks like that. So, an RPA developer is using another computer application to mimic that sort of thing, and that's a little bit about what a developer is.

ZACH: So, are there robots? Do you work with robots?

MATT: Not physical robots. They call them digital workers or digital bots; you can give them names. It really works well, with Sunny the robot and things like that. Nothing physical, just strictly on a computer.

LORA: What kinds of things would you automate? What sort of things would the digital workers be doing in an organization?

MATT: Great question, Lora. There are a lot of different processes and different things you look for in a good RPA candidate, but typically you are looking for high volume, very repetitive work, very manual type processes, where an employee or staff member is spending multiple hours, a day trying to migrate data from one application to another or collect all this data to build a report. Things like that are really the bread and butter of RPA, and we treat the digital workers just like another employee in the sense that they have a username, and they have a password. So, they're able to log into web applications and desktop applications and perform work just like a person would. Things like websites or applications where you need that login information, that's great for RPA because we have digital workers that can do that. But yes. Typically, very manual, very repetitive, high-volume tasks so that we can see a high ROI, or return on investment when we automate, that's typically what we're looking for.

LORA: So, it sounds like it would be that boring, if I could use that word, work. Less than interesting.

MATT: That's exactly it. The work that you don't find a lot of satisfaction in doing. The biggest reward of RPA and automation is the refocusing of the mindset. At least that's what I like to talk about a lot, which is that we want the employee to make a decision on the output of the automation. So, the bot does all this work. The digital worker does all this work and produces an output file. You then look at the output file, and you can decide what that information is. You can pass that along to your superiors. So, you are doing a lot of the decision-making, and your role typically is going to now become a bit more valuable, adding a bit more value. And that is a shift in the focus of the employee mindset. You have your digital worker run overnight. And then you come in in the morning, and you get a nice, lovely email from your robot, Sunny, with a nice output saying, "This is what I did." And then you can—okay, now I can adjust my day based on these results, and I can make some decisions. So, the employees are really focusing on that gray area, that decision-making, whereas the bot is black or white; it needs to do this or that type of thing.

ZACH: So, you're reducing or eliminating this repetitive work so that these workers can make better decisions and do more high-value work. But is your work repetitive?

MATT: That's a good question, Zach. My work is very interesting and, I would say, not so repetitive. In the developer style of things or career path, you certainly are going to be interacting with applications multiple times. So, building applications the same way and doing some of the same steps. But I think what's really awesome about RPA is that every process that comes into your pipeline has something different about it, and what's really great about that is that you learn about a whole plethora of processes in an organization and meet all these individuals you otherwise wouldn't get to talk to. And you learn what they do and how they think; what makes them tick; and their day-to-day work lives. What's a real pain in the butt for them to do every day? And then you get to automate that process and shadow them, and then you help them out and you save them time. And now you know, they do not have to worry about that process. So, my day-to-day life sure is not repetitive at all. It is a lot of investigation into future processes, meeting new people, and making sure that we're developing. Following best practices and that sort of thing. So, in the RPA developer role, you're developing a new process almost every time. There is always something different, which I find refreshing.

ZACH: Can you provide or share with us a recent example or a favorite example of a process that you have automated at work?

MATT: Yes, certainly. I have a couple, the most recent being at ATCO, where we have an AR or accounts receivable invoicing process. And this digital worker, how it was built, is basically that the accounts receivable team will submit an Excel template file on Microsoft Teams, and the digital worker will pick up this Excel file, and then it will log into our Oracle financial system and take all the information from that Excel file and create the invoice in Oracle. So, it will create the invoice directly, and they are filling out all the fields and all the coding on the invoice to make sure it is going to the right approver. There is even a validation step in there. So, this digital worker, this process, occurs quite frequently. You can imagine that it does not do all our invoices, but it certainly does a lot. And then it'll spit out an output file for the accounts receivable team, and they get a look at it and see what invoices were created and what invoices had issues, whether that's a business exception or a system exception. So that's a good one. And then another one that we did at my previous organization that I really found interesting is that we had shape line files, which are engineering pipeline files that the government has stored in their databases. So, in order for us to get this information, we have to log into the government database, download that shape file, and then upload it into another application just so we can see our own pipelines that we have across the province and across Canada. So, we got a digital worker to mine that data for us, which was really cool. So, we actually had the digital worker go in and download hundreds of thousands of our shape files, and then we used those shape files and actually created our own application to display the shape files. So now you know, we didn't have to pay the government a large bunch of money to receive the batch files and bunches every year. We're able to just use the digital worker to go in and mine that data. So, I thought that was a cool process as well.

ZACH: When you say, "digital worker," are you talking about the automation itself or is it something different?

MATT: Yes. I guess you could say we use those words interchangeably. When I say a process, like an RPA process, I mean the process that an individual would do. One process would be that I would open up my Outlook, read some information, and then put it in Google Chrome on a form. That is a process. And the process is what the digital worker does, but the digital worker is more of a runtime resource on the machines. We have these digital workers; they run on their own on what we call virtual machines or dubbed "VMs." They run on these machines. They also have what is called a runtime resource. And so that runtime resource is the RPA tool running constantly to run that process that we've built for it. Hopefully, that makes sense.

ZACH: I'm just going to say back what I think I heard: the actual process that you automate is the work that you're doing or the process that the digital worker will do. The digital worker is running that process. I do not know what the right word is, but it's the hundreds and thousands of iterations of doing that process. Is that correct?

MATT: Yes, you're on the right track for sure. I would consider the digital worker to be, for example, we use UiPath, which is an RPA platform at ATCO. So, the digital worker would be the UiPath license or runtime resource. Same with Blue Prism, another RPA platform. The digital worker would be the Blue Prism license or the Blue Prism runtime resource that runs your process. So, you are certainly on the right track.

LORA: So, we have a couple of questions from students. What are the steps to creating an RPA bot, and how long does it usually take?

MATT: That's a good question. It depends. First off, I guess on the scale of the process, so RPA processes can range from quite quick, small types of processes to what we call enterprise-wide processes. When you are talking about Citizen development with tools such as Power Automate, where individuals build processes on their own desktops, those processes are quite quick. And the process lifecycle is quite quick in terms of you don't have to create any documentation around it. You don't necessarily need to follow design authority or anything like that. You are just building it on your own desktop, but the typical RPA process we see with something like an enterprise-wide solution, or a larger-scale process has a lot of parts to it. UiPath, Blue Prism, both talk about this process lifecycle. I think Blue Prism calls it the Robotic Operating Model. UI Path calls it something else, but they're very similar. It starts with an initial stage in terms of Process discovery, or even slightly before that, awareness, and education on RPA. Because RPA is so new, you first want to educate the organization—educate business units and departments on what RPA is, tell them all about it, and what makes a good process. Then they start to submit ideas, and you start to flesh out those ideas. You do process discovery workshops, you assess the processes, and you evaluate which one you would consider the low-hanging fruit, or which process you would consider having the highest return on investment in terms of amount of time saved for the employee, so they can focus that on higher-value tasks. And then, once you've picked a process, you start the process design document, which is essentially all the specifications about the manual process from the business. You get all that information then you might do another FRQ, which is a functional requirement questionnaire. So, you ask all the questions to the business about all these things you are looking for and all

these questions you need to know before you start developing. Then, once that's approved, you can start developing your code. And at the same time, they'll probably also work on a document that's called the solution design document. And that's similar to the process design document in that, it lays out everything about the process, but the solution design document is specific to the two-b process or the automated process. So, you do that document, and then you move into UAT, which is user acceptance testing. You do some testing and make sure your process works. Then you push it into production, and you have that sign-off; maybe you have your design authority group come in, and they also approve the code and sign off. So, you move it into production. And then typically we have a period after it's in production that we call maybe the Hypercare period, which is when we will make any sort of changes to the process without having to go through the ticket management system. So, the business is like, "hey, this isn't working like we thought." Or "hey, can you just adjust this?" We can do it, no questions asked. And that period's called a hyper care period; it lasts about two weeks. Any change requests or updates after that need to go through a different process. So that is the whole life cycle. If you're talking about just developing, you really start at the beginning stage of what the employee or the individual starts at. You open up the application, you follow the data, and you build just like that.

LORA: Like with a lot of things, the pre-work that you do to really understand the process and what you're trying to solve is a good chunk of the work. And then applying the actual technology and tools is relatively minor. It makes your life easier if you do all that other work ahead of time.

MATT: Oh yeah, you're a hundred percent correct, especially in organizations that are just adopting RPA. No one wants to invest money in this technology and then watch it fail, so you need to do your due diligence in terms of finding that right process, that proof of concept, showcasing what it can do, and then making sure that whatever you automate is a good process to automate and is a process that's going to save the employee's time and the executives can see the ROI, and then you get more sponsorship and you continue down that RPA path. So, you're definitely bang on with that one Lora.

LORA: So, we have another student question. Vivian asked, "What's the hardest thing about being an RPA developer?

Matt: Well, Vivian, I think the hardest part about being an RPA developer is conveying what RPA is and what the goal of RPA is to the business and to individuals that are concerned about it. You will certainly come across this in your RPA career. There's certainly some concern about, "Oh, no, I've heard this digital worker is going to take my job. My job is going to be automated." So probably the hardest part of my role and my career path as an RPA developer is educating individuals in business areas on what RPA is. And hey, we're here to help you. The goal of RPA is to free up some of your time. So, you can focus on those higher-value tasks. You can make decisions; you can do things that you find more rewarding. And we like—I like to pitch it as another tool in the employee toolbox. RPA is just another tool that you can use to make your day-to-day life easier. And once people start to understand that they become a lot more open to

the idea of having something automated. And then, once they start to work with the RPA developer to have their process automated, they see everything that goes into it. And then they see the results when it's running in production and saving them time. It took Kathy three hours to do this process, and she had to do it every second morning, every week. And now that the digital worker has done it, they will realize that holy crap, this is saving me a ton of time. I don't have to worry about this anymore. So, certainly, that would be the hardest part of an RPA developer's role.

LORA: It's always tough with new technology in an organization for some people to adopt it. I can appreciate how that would be a tough one because you want to do great work, and in the long run, it's going to help. But yeah, getting over that hump is sometimes really tough.

LORA: You mentioned a couple of programs that you're using for RPA, so what sort of tools and technology does an RPA developer use?

MATT: Great question, Lora. I would say there's some market leaders in the RPA world. So, these are RPA platform tools, and they range from enterprise-wide to more individual or smaller-scale types of tools. So, the big ones that we really touch on in the RPA industry currently are UiPath and Blue Prism, among others. And then there is Power Automate, which is from Microsoft and part of the Power Platform. All three of those tools are ones that we have boot camps for at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, and then there's also Automation Anywhere, another big one. So as an RPA developer, if you are getting into the field, I would highly recommend doing training or being in a bootcamp for at least one of these tools. And the more tools you can get familiar with, the better off you are going to be in finding a future career path. But what is great about RPA is that once you understand the questions you need to ask about how to build an RPA process, once you understand that, you can transfer your knowledge to any RPA platform. I started with Blue Prism. But now that I'm on the UiPath, it's very easy for me to transfer my knowledge. The technicality is there, but it's not as tricky as understanding what questions to ask and the logic you need to build a successful RPA process.

LORA: So, what does your day look like? Are you coding? Are you working with these tools? Are you working with users or folks? I'm trying to get a sense of, because the title is developers, so in my mind, I always picture developers in the back room, turning out code. But what does an RPA developer's day look like?

MATT: Great question, and that is a bit tougher to answer than you would think. Simply because there are multiple roles in the RPA world, with the developer probably being the most common role. That being said, it depends on the organization as well, and where you're working. Some organizations treat developer roles slightly differently than others. For example, in the organization where I work at ATCO, we treat developers as somewhat of a developer and an analyst type of position combined. Whereas, if you look at an RPA consulting firm, they like to separate those two positions out. So, you'll actually have an RPA developer and an RPA analyst, two separate kinds of roles. The day-to-day life depends on the organization you work for, but typically, a developer's role is unique in that there is a lot more business interaction than you

would imagine. So as an RPA developer, I am constantly talking to the business about the processes that they submitted into our pipeline, asking them questions about the things I need to know to build this process. So, there's constant communication with the business. I am building the documentation for them to approve. So, I am building solution design documents. I am building process design documents, and we have meetings to sign off to make sure that everything in this documentation is what they're looking for. And then I am also developing processes. I am building certain processes. I might also be doing some user acceptance testing for another process, I might be going through that phase as well. And then I'm also maintaining our processes in production. So, I'm looking at our control room or our orchestrator environment, and I'm watching what digital workers are running what processes on what machines and making sure that we're not having any issues. And if there are any issues, I'm contacting the business and asking them or telling them, "Hey, we had a hiccup here", or "Hey you, you didn't put the input file incorrectly". So, my day is ever changing in terms of what I'm doing. And like I said, I mentioned earlier how there are always new processes coming down the pipeline. So, there's always something new that you get to tackle and a new challenge you get to sort out. So that's one thing I really love about being in this field.

ZAC: Of all those activities, what is your favorite?

MATT: I'm slightly conflicted in that because I find a lot of satisfaction in building the process, especially when you make it through user acceptance testing and you move a process into production and then it does exactly what you designed it to do and the business sees the benefit and they're like, "Wow, this is great. Here are five more ideas." I love having a challenge with building the code, solving it, and then being able to give the business the time back to focus on higher value-added tasks. So, I love that part of it. But as I have been going into a bit more of a leadership development role, I've been able to talk to all the different business groups and hear about their day-to-day work and the challenges that they go through. And then they were talking about, "Oh, if this were automated, this would help so much." I really enjoy those conversations. And then, also being an instructor at SAIT, I really enjoy getting people excited about RPA, educating them, and seeing the passion build in them. So, I can't really put it on one thing. But I certainly like developing, and then I also just like talking to businesses and individuals about RPA.

ZAC: I think that's a trend we see in technology. People are trying to get into these more technical roles, and they really focus on the technical skills. And yes, that's table stakes, but where people really differentiate in their careers is being able to understand the business domain. As well as be able to make logic and create stories based on the information, data, process, or automation that they are doing. I am curious, when was the first time you heard the words "RPA" and how long did it take you to determine that you wanted to work in RPA after that?

MATT: I first heard the term RPA just over four years ago, when our organization had an external organization come and tell them all about RPA and develop our first organization-wide RPA process. And my superiors at the time realized, as they were explained by the external

organization, that you need internal individuals to help maintain these processes and continue to build your RPA practice. I was approached at that time, saying, "Hey, we have this cool new automation tool called RPA, and it's in the RPA world. You seem to be somewhat good at computers, and you're great with talking business. Would you be interested in something like this?" At first, I was a little hesitant; my background is in finance, accounting, and business. So, I was like, "Oh, I don't know. I have never done anything like this before; it's not really my area of expertise." Once they started talking about automation and that sort of thing and the benefits, I thought, "Wow, this is cutting edge. This is cool. We haven't heard about this before." I would certainly hate to pass up on the opportunity and then look back at it and be like, "Oh, you know what? I should have gone with that." And to be honest, I took the opportunity to get into the RPA world, and I haven't looked back. I have enjoyed it ever since. So really, it was four and a half years ago, and once I heard it was in the automation world and we are automating business tasks, that really interested me. And like I said, I haven't looked back from there.

ZACH: I have a friend who works at one of these large technology consulting organizations. Maybe it's the same organization, and she was talking to me about blue roles, purple roles, and red roles, and I forget which one's which between the blue and red. But there are technical roles which is one and then there are business roles that are the other. And then there are these purple roles where you need both business domain expertise and technical knowledge. And based on what you are saying, it sounds like there are RPAs in the middle, in that purple role.

MATT: Yes, you are exactly right, Zach. And like I said, it depends on the organization. If you like, if you work for an RPA consulting firm, you might be the developer, which is more technical, or they might make you an analyst, which is more business oriented. But certainly, what I've noticed in a lot of these larger organizations here in Alberta and across the country in Canada is that a lot of them really prefer that individual that has the technical experience, but that can also speak to the business. So, it is certainly more of a purple role mixed bag. And I think that is what makes it unique because a lot of IT roles and tech roles are a lot more backend-type of roles, and you're doing a lot of development on your computer and not speaking to the business as much. Whereas in RPA, you have an extremely high degree of involvement in terms of talking to the business. And, like I have said, I really enjoy being able to do both of those things.

LORA: Absolutely. Just something I'm thinking about, because I think RPA has been around for years. I feel like it has not quite gotten a ton of traction, or maybe it's on the cusp of getting traction in Alberta. Matt, do you have some sort of sense of what types of industries and what types of organizations are successfully using RPA, and where do you see that going?

MATT: Yeah, you are right Lora, RPA has been around for decades. It has been around, more so in the United States, for quite some time. And then it was brought up into Canada on the east coast. So, RPA as a technology is quite prevalent in Ontario. We see RPA firms and consulting firms directly out of Toronto, and now we are starting to get wind of it over here in Alberta. And just like you said, the tech industry is starting to grow. We are seeing some investment in tech in Alberta, and we're slightly diversifying away from oil and gas. So, I think it is great to have

another industry that can help boost the economy. It's definitely emerging, it is an emerging technology. More organizations are taking notice. We have post-secondary educations that are doing boot camps, and we have organizations that are really starting to look to hire individuals from Alberta who are familiar with the RPA world. And not every employer wants to hire someone in Toronto and fly them out here or in the United States, they're starting to look for Alberta RPA individuals. So, the job market, I think, is only increasing and is going to keep increasing. We have all heard of ChatGPT and the artificial intelligence that's coming down the pipeline, and RPA really fits into that world. And I like to say, "Get with it or get lost." Because if you do not deck up this technology in some form, you're going to get left behind in terms of being as efficient as an organization, and organizations realize that. Oil and gas have been involved in the RPA world for a couple years now, and as we know in Alberta, when oil and gas get involved, it's usually a pretty here-to-stay type of thing. So, I think that's great, and we see it in the healthcare industry. It's been in the banking and insurance industries for quite some time. Obviously, oil and gas, energy, and RPA can be very versatile and used in a variety of industries and organizations ranging from small to very large scale. We're seeing it pop up all over the map, and to be frank, I think it's a great time to, to get into RPA right now at this moment, because you're going to just see it grow with the whole automation world as it continues to grow in Alberta.

ZACH: You can get into it before it is cool.

MATT: Exactly. You got it.

LORA: What was interesting is that when we were doing our discovery for the program, we discovered there is a worldwide shortage of RPA developers. So, it is not just in Canada or in Alberta, there are shortages all over the place. And I think that's because this is one of those careers that people just don't know about, or there are a lot of misconceptions about it. You think that you are working with robots, which could be intimidating. Or super cool if that is the way you want to go.

MATT: I agree, there are a couple of barriers to entry. I think, as we touched on before, individuals are a little concerned about moving into the RPA space. Oh, I need to know computer science, or I need to know a coding language. And that is not really true. My background is in finance and business management. I was not a computer science major or anything like that, and I was able to pick up RPA quite easily. So, I think there is still some concern that you have to be very computer-oriented to move into this world. And I do not think that is it. We like to call RPA low-code or no-code, it's not quite no-code, but it's certainly low-code. And the tools are very user-friendly to use, and we're even seeing some Citizen development in the power automated UiPath worlds, which means any everyday employee at an organization can start building these RPA processes on their own desktops. So, it is very user-friendly, and just like you mentioned, I think there are some barriers to entry, and I think it's not as well-known as it should be, but I think we're starting to change that.

LORA: Your background was accounting and finance, and I could see lots of applications relative to accounting processes, but who makes a good RPA developer? What type of person, really, would enjoy the role or be able to transition into it?

MATT: I think RPA is pretty broad in terms of who as an individual could get involved in this field for those reasons I just touched on, for being low-code and not needing to be very tech-savvy to get into this world. In our SAIT boot camps, we've had individuals who were chefs have great success in the bootcamp, musicians and things like that. So, I don't want to close the door on any type of person. There are certainly characteristics that are going to help you when you are starting. You need to have some familiarity with a computer. If you've never touched a computer before, you're going to struggle. You need to understand the Microsoft platform in terms of Excel, Outlook, and all those great tools. You do not need to be very deep in terms of your knowledge base, but you certainly should know some things about computers, and I think looking at RPA, you must have a passion and a drive for helping others. Because I think that's what RPA is about is helping those teams find that extra time. We like to go to business areas that are feeling bogged down. They, all of them, are doing so many tasks every single day that they really could use a digital worker that can start to take a load off. You have to be interested in helping individuals and teams and saving them time. And most people are interested in that. And that, in turn, helps the organization. It will end up with cost savings and time savings across the organization. But in terms of an individual, like I said, some knowledge on computers, some basic knowledge, nothing too crazy. You must have a passion for helping teams and a good project mindset in terms of the project lifecycle would help, if you had some project management skills and communication. We have talked a lot about how you're communicating with the business as well as your RPA team, as well as developing. So, if you have great communication skills, you will be successful in the purple roles of developer and analyst, which Zach mentioned.

ZACH: How many people work in RPA at ATCO? Is it just you, or is it a bigger group?

MATT: So, ATCO is farther along than, I would say, a good chunk of organizations that are involved in the RPA world. Maybe not so much compared to some American organizations, but our approach right now to RPA is more decentralized, meaning that we have teams in finance and accounting. We have teams in our HR, we have teams coming up in supply chain, and we even have multiple RPA tools. So, we use the UiPath, which is our enterprise-wide tool. And then we also have Power Automate, which some people are starting to pick up and use, and we are looking at Citizen development. So, it is hard to put a number on everyone that's involved. My team consists of about a handful of people, including myself as the lead developer and three other developers. We also have more of a business analyst and project manager type of role. We have the RPA owner, and we are starting to bring in some IT people who will sit on the governance board for RPA. That is just in finance and accounting. We are not talking about the other departments just yet. But I think when you're starting an organization, you probably start out with one developer, and I find that the developer needs to do everything at the beginning, unless you get good investment from your executives in terms of multiple developers, maybe an analyst or a project manager, and then you can really hit the ground running. So, I'd say if you

can start with three or four people off the bat, that's really a sweet spot. And then you build from there.

ZACH: So, in your organization, it sounds like you have quite a few RPA developers. Can you talk about a couple people with diverse backgrounds who have come into RPA? The listeners of this podcast are probably saying, "Hey, does this fit for me?" They maybe don't come from finance and accounting like yourself, but can you give us some examples of some diverse people that have come into RPA?

MATT: Certainly. First off, looking at the culture, I think, or the heritage, the business world as a whole is trying to become more diversified by attracting individuals with different backgrounds and perspectives on things. And RPA is not shy about that at all. We have individuals from different parts of the world on our team with different backgrounds and perspectives, and we have some individuals who were more system analysts type roles previously. So still in the IT world, but not so much business oriented and then they transitioned over to the RPA role. We also have individuals from different departments who want to get more involved in Finance and accounting, and then ended up in more of a technology-type role such as RPA. So, I think what really happens sometimes with RPA. For example, if you look at HR and you start building an RPA team and a practice in HR, some of these people that are involved in HR start to be involved in the RPA side, and they have their process automated. They have one of their processes automated, and then they think, "This is interesting, this automation type of thing." And then, because they had their process automated and they were heavily involved in that full life cycle, they start to see and start to have interest in just what RPA was. And "Hey, can I do this? This seems cool. Can I get involved?" And then they start to transition their role from something that is primarily HR-related into something that's considered a tech role. RPA is really fit for anyone who has that passion for helping people and is comfortable with computers. I really think anyone can find success.

ZACH: So, if one of our listeners is listening to this today like, "Okay, RPA is interesting. I would like to learn more. I would like to get trained as an RPA developer." What would be your suggestions or places that you would send them?

MATT: Great question. There are a lot of resources out there. First off, I would like to give a nod to SAIT, they do a really great RPA bootcamp and that the curriculum is continuously developing. So, if you have the time and are seriously considering RPA, something like attending a postsecondary bootcamp is going to give you a huge boost in that area because you're going to learn the technical skills as well as the business skills. And there's so much support behind that program. So, if you're really interested, consider a post-secondary bootcamp or course such as the one offered by SAIT. But if you are not quite ready to dive that far in just yet, I would consider looking up YouTube videos on the RPA platforms themselves. So UiPath, Blue Prism, and Power Automate. Do a little of your own research. And those organizations and platforms offer free online training as well. It's not as in-depth as in, you are going to learn how to talk to the business, and you're really going to have hands-on exercises and case studies and that type of thing, but you can pick up some skills just from doing their online training, which is free. You

can go to the UiPath Academy and do the foundation developer course. You can go to Blue Prism University and do the foundation developer course, which are the courses that a lot of developers take to get certified as their first kind of developer course, so anyone can do that; it is free online. So doing something like that. Obviously, LinkedIn's also a great resource if you can get on LinkedIn and follow automation and RPA individuals and see what they're sharing and see the events that are happening in your area. I think in Calgary and Alberta, we're having more and more RPA and automation webinars that you can attend, including ones on UiPath and Blue Prism. Microsoft puts on events that anyone can attend. You don't need to be affiliated with an organization. You can show up at these events, meet people that are in the RPA world, see what their day-to-day life is, and get an idea of what it is. And if you love it, then great. You continue down that road. And if you don't, no harm, no foul; you're able to investigate something else. Just to reiterate, a post-secondary course is probably your best overall bet but looking at the platforms online and going to their universities and doing that training, or looking up YouTube videos, you can learn how to build processes on your own. You can build your own portfolio. You can add that portfolio to a resume and show an employer, "Hey, look at these processes I've built." That is a huge thing when you're applying for our PA jobs and then attending events. So, I think all those are great resources to help you get started on your journey in this RPA world.

LORA: I think there are some great communities starting to be built around RPA and a bit of a user group. And I know, Matt, that you've done some work with the community in terms of supporting new RPA developers. And I'm curious about, maybe for you or maybe for an RPA developer in general, where you see your career going from here? Is this a launching point for you, or do you feel like you have reached your dream job?

Matt: I love where I'm at. Certainly, I really enjoy where I'm at in my career path. That being said, I think RPA is a steppingstone to a lot of other technologies. RPA is a steppingstone into automation, and a part of being a really good RPA developer is understanding all of the automation tools. Just because someone comes to you with a potential automation or RPA candidate doesn't mean that RPA is the quickest or best tool to use. So, you have to point them in the right direction. It might be an API, which is an application programming interface, or a Power BI report. There might be a different automation tool that's better suited, but because an RPA developer has that understanding of all these different automation tools, you might find that one of them is more interesting to you. So, because I'm in this RPA world, if I really wanted to, I could start to get involved maybe more on the Power BI side and automating recording, or I could get more involved on the IT side in terms of database building and writing scripts for databases. Or I could get more involved on the Power Automate side, which is more Citizen development. So, there are so many different areas that you can disperse into and find your niche once you're in the RPA world, never mind the different tools you can use, whichever one you find is the best for you or for your organization. But the different roles in RPA, from solution architect to developer, to analyst to program manager to RPA champion, all those roles, and then again, all the other automation tools that have their own teams, that have their own COEs that you can start to get involved in. So, automation is really large in terms of the pathways and career roles. And we're starting to see more intelligent automation director-type roles and

digital transformation director-type roles. And those are all-encompassing, right? They are not RPA directors; they're automation directors, because there are all these different tools. So, I believe that is a career path in which I am interested. And I like the RPA tools themselves, so I am going to stick around here for a while. But who knows? I might move over to a different automation tool down the road.

ZACH: And there might be a career path that does not exist today that you might end up on. It's the great thing about technology. We have to ask on a podcast like this, because I am sure our listeners are curious: what could someone expect for a salary range when entering an RPA? And how does that change over time based on your knowledge?

MATT: So, it does fluctuate in terms of the organization you work for, but I think generally, at least in Canadian dollars, if you get certified as a UiPath, Blue Prism, or Power Automate developer, the starting base salary is really in the $60,000 to $65,000 range. And then once you get good with RPA, once you can show that you can communicate with the business well and perform that type of analyst role as well as the technical side of the rule, that's when you can start moving more into a leadership type position within the RPA role, right? You know the technical ins and outs of the code, but you also know what the business is looking for. So that purple role that we have talked about is where you start to transition, and you'll start to see the salaries grow quite quickly. Definitely past the six-figure mark in terms of what you can reach, and I don't really know if there's a limit to it. This is interesting because businesses and organizations pay quite well for this type of role, but it is not that hard to get into. Like I mentioned, this is the sweet spot. If you can get in now and learn this stuff, you are going to be happy with the salary that you're getting. And down the road we're going to have a lot of RPA developers and things will change. But at least right now, and I think for quite a while, we are going to see a steady increase in terms of salary.

ZAC: Thanks for sharing.

LORA: Matt, I really think you should change your title to "Robot Overlord."

MATT: Yes, we can. What is that movie with Will Smith? iRobot, where the robots take over, and as long as I am the robot overlord, then I'm fine. It is everyone else that's going to have an issue.

LORA: If that happens, I am knocking on your door for sure.

MATT: Yes. You know exactly where to find me.

LORA: I don't know about you, Zach, but I've learned a ton, and I always love talking to you, Matt. It's always interesting, and I'm really excited about RPA because of the opportunity it gives people to pivot into a tech role that doesn't need you to learn code, but it really leverages domain expertise from your background or even just a passion. I think it is a good option for people who are looking to do something different or adjacent in their career and are not sure

where to turn. I just want to thank you so much for the time that you spent today. It was amazing chatting with you.

ZACH: Echoing what Lora said, I said this in our pre-interview, but I did not know what RPA stood for a couple months ago, and I've learned so much through you, Matt, and through Lora. So, thank you for sharing today.

MATT: Likewise, I am really happy to be here, and it is really great to talk to you, Lora, as well as to you, Zach. I can see that you are interested in the RPA world a little bit, and that little spark that kind of interested me got to both of you a little bit. I am always here to chat about RPA and automation, if you guys want to do another podcast or if you have any questions. And simply happy to be here. So, thanks for your time today, guys.

LORA: Matt is such a nice guy.

ZACH: He certainly is.

LORA: His story and his journey about how he really took hold of an opportunity to learn something new and turned it into a new career is super inspiring to me.

ZACH: Yes, likewise. And I think a really great example of someone that is working in an industry and really wants to improve that industry from the inside out through RPA and automation and showing that bridge between these new roles of people with that strong business acumen or industry knowledge as well as those modern technology skills. And as someone who was completely new to RPA before this experience, I think it is quite an exciting career path. And the sky's the limit with all the new IA and AI that's going forward. So, it is an interesting story that definitely has broadened my horizons.

LORA: One of the things that we have been really thinking about—and Matt's really underestimating it—is that RPAs are the gateway to digital transformation for a lot of companies. When you think about how to automate routine processes and free up time to do more meaningful work, you create a mind shift in terms of how we do things better and leverage technology to do things better. And what we have been hearing is that it opens a lot of doors. So, I think Matt really underestimates the impact that he's having. Even on how companies can transform by championing this cause with the implementation of RPA,

ZACH: I love that. For me, when I was looking through my transition to technology, I was disappointed. I wanted to do something more innovative and entrepreneurial, but everything was tech-related, and I felt like I was not a tech person. But I realized it was really the blend of technology and people that led us to better outcomes. And I think that just the continuation and the theme of what you've shared here, Lora, and what Matt was sharing, it's really about allowing people to think of things differently, do work differently, be more creative, and have

more meaningful and fulfilling careers at that level of self-actualization in the hierarchy of needs versus doing more mundane tasks. So, it's exciting the problem-solving in the work that's being done in Matt's role in RPA and the empowerment that his role is doing for everyone else in the organization. It's really a strategic priority about how a company operates and thinks about doing business.

LORA: Yes, absolutely. We do hear a lot of concern about RPA taking jobs away. But really, the data hasn't supported that as netting out that it does take away jobs because the meaningful work just creates more opportunity as those organizations do more, provide better services, and service their companies and their customers more, seeing a bit of a shift, and it really is a shift to more meaningful work.

ZACH: Yeah, I couldn't agree more. It is just a whole conversation that makes me even more excited about new careers and technologies and new career paths that we do not really know about yet and the opportunities that are available for people that are willing to continuously learn new things and just apply themselves in new ways in a new digital workforce.

LORA: Absolutely. Thanks for listening.

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