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Working Today

“One of the earliest groups that got me interested in doing this was called Web Grrls,” says Sara Horowitz, Executive Director of Working Today. “It was for women interested in technology. You would go to a loft in Soho and there was just a bunch of chairs. You would get up and say ‘My name is Sara and I can give information about Such and Such, and what I need is So and So.’ People would sit there and take down your need and then they would get back to you. It was face-to-face and then it was on-line. Social capital, even though it’s a crucial piece of democracy, is not a product; it’s a by-product...of doing something. We sometimes say, ‘Oh, social capital, it would be so wonderful to build some,’ but really it’s ‘this building or this project or program that needs to get started.’ Social capital is about doing something...clear and definite.”

The first project and major activity of Working Today is building links among associations, unions, non-profits and companies in Silicon Alley in Manhattan. “The number-one need that people here have is health insurance. And that’s an immediate thing that people can understand and come together on. People will...join if there is a definite reason. Then we can...start connecting people [through a database]. We can say to all these individuals, ‘Do you want to meet candidates? Do you want workshops? Can we create literal space or virtual space for you? What other kinds of things would you like to come together on?’” Horowitz believes you can build the social capital if you start from a place of need.

“A worker starts out from a point of self-interest and then makes the connection, ‘hey, we’re in this together.’” she explains. “The basis of democracy is the unromantic notion of self-interest. For example, think about...health insurance for the workers in the new media. Everything is funded by venture capital. The companies grow, or die, very quickly. Your company dies, you...get [a] job at another company that is growing fast. But that company dies, so you go to another one. It grows, then it disappears. You move on. So, even if you have the money for health insurance, you can’t get the care and the coverage because you keep moving around like crazy. So, what we are doing is creating the first private sector portable benefits package that you can keep as you shift from here to there, whether you work as an employee or as a free-lancer. That will be funded with private money. And we’re working on a plan for low-income people, too. That needs government money, but the delivery system is the same.”

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