

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You're listening to Work in Progress. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor in chief of WorkingNation. Work in Progress explores the rapidly changing workplace through conversations with innovators, educators, and decision-makers, people with solutions to today's workforce challenges.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

It's my pleasure to welcome Craig Newmark, founder of Craig Newmark Philanthropies and of Craig's List to this special Work in Progress podcast for WorkingNation and South by Southwest EDU online. Thank you very much, Craig, for joining me.

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

Hey, it's my pleasure.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I want to talk to you today about philanthropy. A lot of people know your history and it's been about 20 years since you stepped away from the helm of Craigslist, which you founded in 1995. And since 2016, your focus, bulk of your time, and it seems a considerable amount of your money has gone to philanthropy. I would like to get into some of those issues in a minute. But first I want to ask you a question, which is what is driving your overall philanthropy? What's at its heart? What's in your heart that makes these issues so important to you?

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

Well, a lot of it has to do with what our country aspires to be, about fairness and opportunity and respect. We need to do better with that. And we need to, for that matter, to protect the country against bad actors, people of little conscience who don't believe in fairness, opportunity, and respect, who have a very different idea of what our country should be. I believe that the arc of the moral universe is long, but that it does bend towards justice. So people of goodwill should protect the country, should protect those values, should move them ahead. And we should not only push towards those values, but we need to protect the people who have fought for those values. We need to protect the people who are fighting for those values. Like the people who fought in kinetic wars towards those ends. Those are our veterans and their families. They need a break. We need to protect the researchers and so on, who are fighting to protect the country against disinformation and that kind of thing.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Let's start with the veterans. I know that you've put a lot of money into those issues and you're on the Bob Woodruff Foundation's board. And so recently, you put money into hunger through his association. And it's not just about veterans though, it is about other people who are food insecure, but let's talk about the veterans first.

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

Well, to start, I figure if someone's going to risk their life to protect me, I should stand up for them. Our country is kind of forgetting how much we owe vets. I've also learned that their families give up a great deal while the active service member is deployed, maybe overseas, maybe in harm's way. So for 10 or so years, I've been doing what I can to support vets and their families.

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

It did occur to me a few months ago that food insecurity is a big problem for a lot of people in this country. A lot of people don't know where their next meal is coming from. They may go to bed hungry, or they may go to bed seeing that there's nothing in their pantry. So I figured I should do something about that. And with the pandemic and its related economic collateral damage, tens of millions of more Americans are going to bed hungry. And a lot of them are vets, their families, and sometimes active service members and their families. This pisses me off. And instead of staying pissed off, I could do something about it, which means finding people who are good at helping and then providing them with resources they need, mostly money, but secondarily, influence and communications support. And so that's what I've been doing. That's the pattern in all my philanthropy. I find people who are good at their job and help.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Yeah. For the numbers, I saw a recent number that 30 million adults and 12 million children go to bed not always having enough to eat. So that has been exacerbated because of the pandemic. And so many people who have lost their jobs. So that's such an important issue.

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

Maybe a bigger number. In any case, I'm doing what I can and other people are trying to pitch in as well

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

By funding something like the Bob Woodruff Foundation, they are giving that money out to other organizations, correct?

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

Yeah. They're doing a much better job of that than that too. Their model was finding good organizations, vetting them, and funding them. Now they have a network of networks of organizations on the ground, people who are good at their jobs across the country, addressing real needs of veterans, particularly food, and funding them in increasingly large numbers.

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

The intention is that if you're in an area with a lot of veterans, you can find a group who's doing a good job by connecting to the Bob Woodruff group called Got Your 6. That's a reference to,

when someone's on the field, thinking they're perspective as a clock, six is in the back of them. So got your six means they got your back.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And did you look at local organizations as well? And I like to call out these organizations, in San Francisco, I think it's Swords to Plowshares that are helping people with homeless.

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

They are Vietnam Era Organization and they do a great job, particularly with veteran homelessness.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I noticed that the pin tweet on your Twitter account, 94% of U.S. teachers spend their own money on school supplies. And that you have given money to organizations like DonorsChoose. Does it come from the same thought that these are people who are serving us and so you're serving them?

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

That's exactly right. Teachers do a great deal for our country. They're underpaid. They're not given the resources they need. DonorsChoose helps the situation. We need a lot more help, but it's actually pretty useful. The only downside for me is that I spent a lot of time on Twitter retweeting their projects. So if you look at my tweet stream, maybe it's half teachers than other stuff like standing up for the country directly or by indulging in bird photos or other things.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I have followed you on Twitter, and I do think it's fantastic that you share those because I know part of what you have said your mission is, and when you do this, is you bring awareness to those needs. I find it really sad that this is the way teachers have to go about funding their materials,

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

It pisses me off, but at least I can do something constructive about it, which helps with anger management. Anger isn't good for anyone, and so it's much better to help solve a problem than to be angry.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So pissing you off seems to be a theme if you know ... That is in there. Does it piss you off there's not enough women in the tech field?

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

I guess so. The deal was that there are things which aren't right and they aren't right for reasons which are not good. So rather than being angry, I try to do something constructive. A lot of it is

based on the notion that I learned in Sunday school from Mr. And Mrs. Levin, who taught me that you want to treat people like you want to be treated.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And some of the projects that you're funding, Girls Who Code, AnitaB.org. I believe that you just made a donation to that group. It's shocking to me that there are about 60% of all undergraduate women are getting degrees in tech, but when it comes to graduation, only 20% of those women are working in tech.

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

Yeah. It's disappointing too because when I went to a college, computer sciences, this is early '70s and it looks like a lot of women were getting degrees, but something happened so that the women who got good jobs disappeared and then fewer women were taking computer science courses. The idea is to turn that around. So I'm working with groups like University of San Francisco, also at Case Western Reserve, my alma mater. And I just did a podcast with them because it looks like we're turning that around by basically standing up for women and people in other groups who want to get into computer sciences and other fields like cyber security.

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

Right now, there's an enormous need for everyone with talent in computer sciences and specifically in cybersecurity because there's hundreds of thousands of jobs in cybersecurity that need people to fill them.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

A lot of people I've talked to say that for underrepresented groups like minorities, women, sometimes what turns them off is not seeing someone there who is like a role model or a mentor.

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

That could be the case. It's something the people I support are addressing maybe slowly. I'd like it to be, for the near term, right away. But that may be a medium or long-term thing. I have to defer that to the people who are good at their job. And those are people who have things like social skills.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Well, you're doing so good so far, so ...

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

I can simulate social skills for as much as 90 minutes. After that, I will start getting cranky.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Okay. Well, we won't keep you that long. One of the other things that I want to ... Well, actually, I'd like to go back to the cybersecurity thing. That's an area that we have talked a lot about at WorkingNation. And for those who are listening for the first time, WorkingNation is a non-profit media organization, focused on jobs now and in the future. So we are focused on, these are opportunities. And cybersecurity is a big opportunity for people. I think the number I heard worldwide was like 2 million by the year 2025, they were going to need, which is huge.

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

Yeah. Right now, cyber security, well, those skills can largely be picked up by anyone who finds themselves really comfortable and good with computers. The idea then is to find a training to get into that. I don't think you need a college degree to be good at that. What I'm doing is I'm part of a group called Vets in Tech, which is about getting vets jobs in the technology industry. My focus is on training hundreds of vets every year for cybersecurity skills, which means they can get a new job, a new career in that area, or they can upskill themselves in cybersecurity so that they can keep the jobs they have and work on the next promotion.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

That's absolutely true. You don't need to have a four-year degree. You can get an associate's or just the training with an industry recognized credential. I will happily put all that into the article online when we post this, so anybody interested can find that info.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You've given millions of dollars away to support journalism, protect press freedom, and in support of local news. Why is that such an important issue to you?

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

Well, in high school history, my teacher set my politics in place, which are about the Bill of Rights, the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution. And tied in with all that is, as I like to put it, the trustworthy press is the immune system of democracy. A trustworthy press protects us in terms of attempts at disinforming the public, the press protects us against corrupt politicians, or is supposed to do that.

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

So I figure, I have the resources to help people who are good at their job in journalism and journalism ethics. I help support them, again, with money and influence. That's working. I'm one of a whole bunch of people who stood up for the press last year, such that the press did a better job than they did in 2016. And my thinking, the immune system of democracy perform better than it did in 2016, they still need to do a lot better and I'm engaged with that.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And what about local news? I've worked in local news. I've worked in national news and I have seen budgets erode. I don't think in the last job I had, I did more than one story on local job opportunities or the city council. I mean, these are things that people need to know about what's going on in their community.

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

Well, we live in neighborhoods and communities and towns. Even if you're in a big city, your neighborhood is kind of a small town and we need news to cover that. And to that end, I'm supporting the American Journalism Project, Report for America, and then a couple of specific institutions like THE CITY in New York and WNYC who do a good job of covering what matters to New Yorkers. The Times, the Wall Street Journal really don't do much of that anymore. Because sometimes you care about what's happening with the local school board or what's really going on in City Hall. And sometimes, like what Gothamist covers, you want to hear more about local celebrities, like Pizza Rat or the fabulous Mandarin Duck who has since disappeared, but I'm sure was delicious.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Well, the snowy owl is still in central park.

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

That's right. It's snowy owl fandom is very much alive. If I were to go up to central park, I would like to make an appointment with the snowy owl.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You told me in an email exchange that the birdwatching, which you have referenced already is half-assed, the birds have to come to you.

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

Yes. In New York and here, my wife and I put out food and water for the birds. The deal is we've done so, then they need to come over and to be watched. In fact, even where I'm sitting, I see a number of birds coming around to be watched, mostly the usual: dark-eyed juncos, house finches. Occasionally, a hummingbird will come over to the window and check things out. There's also a couple of very curious crows who may be learning that we are the source of their snacks

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

In my own home or at my own home, I'm watching mine from my porch and you've named all the ones that I have. I do have a mourning dove that likes to come by a lot as well.

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

I love mourning doves, but our mourning doves are all, for some reason, in New York.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I do have the Allen's hummingbird who visits nearly every day.

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

Yeah.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Yes. So kind of to wrap up. I love talking about birds and all my colleagues are tired of me talking about birds, so I will move on. My own nerdism. I'm thinking bird and nerd is a new podcast that I need to start.

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

Yes.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I will invite you to be the first guest, if you'd like. I want to talk about one last thing. So the money that you're spending influence your dollars. Is there any issue that you think is underrepresented, underreported on that you would like to use your influence to help people know about?

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

Right now, especially as a result of report yesterday from the Election Integrity Partnership, they pointed out that the greatest threat to our country are people attacking our country using different disinformation techniques. And that it is time to fight back more effectively, starting with the disinformation super spreaders, public figures who are really good at lying. And that's the next step in terms of protecting our country from those who wish to do us harm.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And is there any group that you're looking at right now, or that you have put money into?

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

It's a network of groups. I'll leave some out as I say, there's the Stanford Internet Observatory. There's the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, Harvard Kennedy Shorenstein Center. There's various groups at the Columbia and CUNY journalism schools. There is Aspen Digital via the Aspen Institute. There's the Alliance for Securing Democracy and the Atlantic Council DFRLab.

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

I think I caught all the major groups. The deal is people of goodwill are working together to defend the country, and they're also taking on considerable risk. Because the more attraction and success they have, the more they draw the attention of people who want to hurt our country.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Craig, thank you very much. I really appreciate you taking the time to talk to us at WorkingNation and South by Southwest.

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

It's my pleasure. My regards to the mourning doves

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And to the birds in your backyard as well. Bye, bye.

Craig Newmark, Craig Newmark Philanthropies founder:

Thank you. Bye.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Thank you.