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Radio 4 Today Programme

INTERVIEWER: How valuable are things like good communication skills and teamwork to a company's bottom line? Well a new campaign is claiming these 'soft skills' as they are known can contribute around £90 billion to the economy, and will grow for the next five years. Some of the names lending their support to this campaign are the CBI, the Federation of Small Businesses and the business entrepreneur James Caan, who is here with us in the studio. Good morning to you. What do we mean by 'soft skills'? We don't mean being 'soft', do we?

JAMES CAAN: We certainly don't Simon. I think what we mean is actually hard, tangible skills. And I think what this campaign is about is bringing awareness to both employers and employees that in today's modern world, things like effective communication skills, good teamwork skills, working as part of a team, taking responsibility and making good decisions, are characteristics and qualities that we think lead to a more productive workforce. And I think one of the things that we found is when people apply for jobs who may not have the academic qualifications to rely on, then how else do they present themselves to an employer that makes them attractive or effective? And I passionately believe that some of these skills make the difference of being able to separate your skills and demonstrate that you can be just as effective as somebody else. Also, what I want to do is to make sure that where employers are looking to assess individuals within the workplace, I think these are the five fundamental drivers in terms of communication skills, teamwork, time management, decision making and most importantly taking responsibility as part of the evaluation process.

INTERVIEWER: But doesn't that make perfect sense? I mean, it strikes me that it would be crazy for anyone to think that those things weren't important. Are you saying are we getting worse at it? For example, young people entering the workforce – is there less focus on that? Have we lost touch? Have we started to value them less? Are we worse at it?

JAMES CAAN: I think what it is ... so the Government body that does various surveys, YouGov, did a survey of 2000 employees who felt that employers didn't recognise those skills and they weren't demonstrating those as part of their strengths and qualifications. And when we surveyed 650 corporate organisations, 97% of them said they thought they were really important. But the question is, nobody does anything about it.

INTERVIEWER: If you had to choose between someone who was applying to a job in your organisation, someone who has got, you know, a first class degree from some university, and someone who has just got that knack of talking to people, understanding what they want and inspiring and organising the people around them – who wins?

JAMES CAAN: I think the person with the 'soft skills'. Simply because that's what I think has led to some of the achievements that I have had, because I didn't have that university degree. And I think my own success I think is predominately based on the kind of core human skills that I have been able to develop over time. And I think there are lots of successful people around the world who I think didn't have that quality of education, but have got very good human skills that they've relied on to be able to perform and be successful.

INTERVIEWER: And very briefly, the idea is that it's to have a consultation and present some recommendations in a couple of months' time?

JAMES CAAN: Yes, so we are running a three month campaign where we've launched a website for called backingsoftskills.co.uk where we're encouraging both employers and employees to come forward so we can get their feedback in order to produce a report at the end of the year, demonstrating that the current survey shows that this can be

worth as much as £88 billion to this economy. So clearly, I think it is something that is very important.

INTERVIEWER: Ok, James Caan, thank you very much indeed. And that's it for the business news this morning.