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## SOFT SKILLS FOR WORKPLACE SUCCESS: WHAT EDUCATORS AND HEALTHCARE LEADERS NEED TO KNOW

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Current research shows that a large percentage of young people preparing to enter the workforce over the next two decades are significantly lacking on the soft or applied skills such as teamwork, decision-making and communication. Recent national reviews of employers and educators revealed that many graduates lack soft skills such as work ethic, professional interactions and respect – skills they believe are essential for a successful career during and after college. The importance of soft skills beyond academic knowledge has become a pervasive concern among business executives and educators in higher institutions. The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the importance of soft skills in the context of higher education and the workplace. Content analysis using focus group data from a total of 120 participants that included health profession students, faculty, and community business leaders in northeast Louisiana revealed major themes regarding the importance and necessity of soft skill development in higher education and today's work settings. Secondary research was completed to analyze current studies regarding essential soft skills employers' value most: communication fundamentals, interpersonal skills and teamwork to advanced critical thinking. In addition, methods to incorporate and assess soft skills in higher education and employee mentoring practices are presented. Findings offer practical suggestions for healthcare leaders and educators to develop soft skills training within curricula and organizations. The presentation concludes with the impact of these practices on student success, job placement and the workforce.