**Ideas Adapted from “Acing the Interview” by Mary Jeanne Vincent**

**SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR XTREME BEGINNINGS**

**IMPORTANT: Begin by smiling, shaking hands and introducing yourself!**

1. **Tell me about yourself.**

Hidden Opportunity: To hit the ground running, show that you know what’s important, and demonstrate why you are an excellent choice.

Preparation: Identify four or five key skills that will be of most value to the company in the role you seek. Identify and practice your success story for each of those skills.

Response: Immediately cut to the chase! “Based on what I know about the position, it seems you would be most interested in my \_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_\_ skills. Which one would you like to hear first?” Offer the success story that demonstrates the skill, and then ask, “Would that be useful in this position?” Follow up with, “What would you like to hear about next?”

Variation: Tell me about your background.

1. **What courses do you like best in high school, and why?**

Hidden Opportunity: To demonstrate how you can solve the interviewer’s problem and become an asset to the company.

Preparation: Assess your strengths before you begin your job search. Identify five skills you possess that are essential for the work you seek. Include both technical skills and soft skills. Remember that most employers are looking for computer skills, interpersonal skills, strong work ethic, analytical skills, honesty/integrity, motivation/initiative, teamwork skills, flexibility/ adaptability. Review the job requirements and identify which key skills that you’ve learned an enhanced through your classes will best match employer’s needs.

Response: Describe three key skills you’ve learned in classes that best fit the job requirements. For each one, offer a specific example or success story from class that demonstrates your expertise.

Variation: What are your key skills as they relate to this position?

1. **What subjects do you like least in high school, and why?**

Hidden Opportunity: To respond in a way that strengthens rather than weakens your candidacy.

Preparation: This question is easy if you’re prepared. Prior to the interview, prepare two answers using one of the approaches below. If asked about a second weakness, tell the interviewer you will have to think about it.

Response: #1 Offer a weakness (class) that is not related to the position or that teaches something not related to top skills and qualities of a perfect candidate.

#2 Offer a weakness that you have overcome or class that you started out doing poorly but greatly improved your grade.

#3 Offer a weakness (class) that is really strength. (This is the approach most commonly attempted and the most difficult to demonstrate successfully.)

#4 Offer a weakness that the interviewer already knows about and has dismissed as unimportant.

Variation: What is your greatest weakness?

1. **If I were to ask your teachers to describe you, what would they say?**

Hidden Opportunity: To show that you work well with authority and that your current or previous manager (teacher) respects you.

Preparation: If you know your manager (teacher) thinks highly of your work this is a cinch to answer. If, on the other hand you have a less than wonderful relationship with your manager (teacher) or he or she has been highly critical of your work you need to carefully think through your answer to this question ahead of time.

Response: Be positive and identify a work habit or trait that the boss (teacher) praised you for or at least didn’t criticize.

Variation: If I spoke to your previous manager (teacher), what would he or she say are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?

1. **What are your interests, strengths and weaknesses?**

Hidden Opportunity: To focus on the employer’s agenda and demonstrate how you can solve the interviewer’s problem.

Preparation: Assess your interests and strengths before you begin your job search. Identify five skills you possess that are essential for the work you seek. Include both technical skills and soft skills. Review the job requirements and identify which of your key skills best match employer requirements. Also, identify your interests to show a passion for the job and positive attitude!

Response: Describe three key skills that best fit the job requirements. For each one, offer a specific example or success story demonstrating your expertise and interests.

Variation: What are your key skills as they relate to this position?

Hidden Opportunity: To respond in a way that strengthens rather than weakens your candidacy.

Preparation: This question is easy if you’re prepared. Prior to the interview, prepare two answers using one of the approaches below. If asked about a second weakness, tell the interviewer you will have to think about it.

Response:

#1 Offer a weakness that is not related to the position.

#2 Offer a weakness that you have overcome.

#3 Offer a weakness that is really strength. (This is the approach most commonly attempted and the most difficult to demonstrate successfully.)

#4 Offer a weakness that the interviewer already knows about and has dismissed as unimportant.

Variation: What is your greatest weakness?

1. **Have you ever had a conflict with a teacher or classmate? How was it resolved?**

Hidden Opportunity: Demonstrate your professionalism and willingness to work through conflict.

Preparation: Identify one or more situations from your past when you had to work with a difficult person and the strategies that made it easier for you to do so.

Response: Pick a situation that had a positive outcome. However, if the only situation you can think of had a less than positive outcome you must describe what you learned from the experience and how that knowledge will ensure a more positive result in the future.

Variation: Give me an example of an individual with whom you had a conflict and how you handled it.

1. **What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort? Describe a situation in which you did so.**

Hidden Opportunity: For this question, it is important to demonstrate that you truly do have motivation and that you will take initiative on the job. This means that you will do things without being asked. Show that you have internal motivation and drive to do your best!

Preparation: Think of some examples of times that you have been eager to complete a task to the best of your ability. Practice telling stories that highlight you taking initiative and being motivated to do your best and go above and beyond.

1. **What accomplishments have been most rewarding for you? Why?**

Hidden Opportunity: Entertain the interviewer with a powerful story demonstrating why you are the best person for the position.

Preparation: Practice telling success stories that highlight your accomplishments. Always prepare more than what you think you will need!

Response: This is another opportunity to highlight what you can do for the company. Describe one of your most stellar accomplishments from the last twelve months. This is your big chance. Make the most of it! Briefly set up the problem, and then explain what you did to solve it, and finally talk about the spectacular results you achieved. This is the time to toot your own horn!

Variation: Talk about a special contribution you’ve made to an employer.

1. **Describe a situation in which you worked as part of a team. What role did you take on? What went well and what didn't?**

Hidden Opportunity: Show the employer that you know how to work with other people and that you can take responsibility for anything that went wrong. You never want to say anything negative about another person in an interview.

Preparation: Practice telling stories that highlight successful teamwork projects where you showed leadership and communication skills. Always prepare more than you will need!

Response: This is another great opportunity to highlight what you can do for the company. Describe a time when you used teamwork and leadership. You might also demonstrate responsibility. Do not say anything negative about another person in the interview so be careful of the “what didn’t go well” question. Try to focus on a problem that you overcame or solved to answer this question. Explain the results that your group achieved.

1. **What careers do you think you may be interested in and why?**

Hidden Opportunity: To convince the interviewer of your interest in the current position/company while leaving the door open for future promotions.

Preparation: Research the career field and carefully consider why it is potentially the right position for you now and how it would be a springboard for future career growth.

Response: Give a broad answer rather than identify a specific job. Ask what opportunities exist in the company. Refer back to trends or new directions that your research uncovered or that the interviewer touched upon earlier in the conversation.

1. **Are you currently working part-time? What do you like about your job? What do you not like about your job?**

Hidden Opportunity: The things that you like about your job probably relate to your strengths, and you want to convince the interviewer of your strengths!

Preparation: Use this opportunity to be convincing with specific examples from your work experience. Brainstorm examples of how you show your strengths on the job!

Response: Tell short examples of ways that you exemplify your strengths on the job. Be careful not to talk too long or ramble. Also, when you are discussing things that you do not like about your job, do not bad mouth your boss or co-workers. It is never a good idea to talk bad about other people in a job interview. Be careful in how you answer this question. When discussing things that you do not like, try to discuss tasks that you know would not be required for this position.

1. **If you are not currently working, have you had any past work experience? Tell me about that experience.**
2. **What qualities should a successful employee possess?**

The top skills and qualities of a perfect candidate for any job include: computer skills, interpersonal skills, a strong work ethic, analytical skills, honesty/integrity, motivation/initiative, teamwork skills, and flexibility/adaptability.

1. **Last month, how many days of school did you miss? How would you relate absence from school and performance on the job?**

You should not lie about your absences from school, however, be aware that interviewers might relate school absenteeism to work absenteeism!

1. **What things would be most important to you in a job?**

Hidden Opportunity: Show that you are motivated by saying that you want to be challenged. Show that you treat others with respect and would like to be treated in the same manner. Show your values, such as honesty, strong work ethic, interpersonal skills.

Preparation: Think of times when you have been treated well by teachers or former employers and how you would hope to have similar experiences in the future. This will also allow you to show that you have strong interpersonal skills and that you were a good student/employee.

1. **If I had a job opening, why should I hire you?**

Hidden Opportunity: Demonstrate how hiring you will solve their problem.

Preparation: Identify the problems and challenges facing the organization. Match your skills to their needs and prepare specific examples of when and how you have solved similar problems in the past.

Response: This is another opportunity to sell yourself! Use it! Take a moment to reflect on the challenges the interviewer previously indicated he or she faced. Respond by explaining how you can successfully meet those challenges.

Variation: Why should we hire you over any other candidate? Ignore the “over any other candidate” part of the question since you have no way of knowing enough about other candidates to comment.

1. **What are your summer plans?**

Hidden Opportunity: To convince the interviewer of your interest in the current position while leaving the door open for future promotions.

Preparation: Research the position and carefully consider why it is potentially the right position for you now and how it would be a springboard for future career growth.

Response: Give a broad answer rather than identify a specific job. Ask what opportunities exist in the company. Refer back to trends or new directions that your research uncovered or that the interviewer touched upon earlier in the conversation.

Variation: Do you want your boss’s job?

1. **What are your plans after graduation?**

Hidden Opportunity: Show that you are goal-oriented and that you do have realistic, specific, and attainable goals.

Preparation: Brainstorm specific, realistic, attainable goals that you might achieve in the next 1-2 years.

**IMPORTANT: Please remember to thank the Interviewer and SMILE. It is always appropriate to send the interviewer a thank you note, and it will set you apart from other candidates.**