



Seattle Aquarium Staff Training: Enhancing Educational Environments Through Foundational Communication Skills and Behavior Analysis

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INTRODUCTION

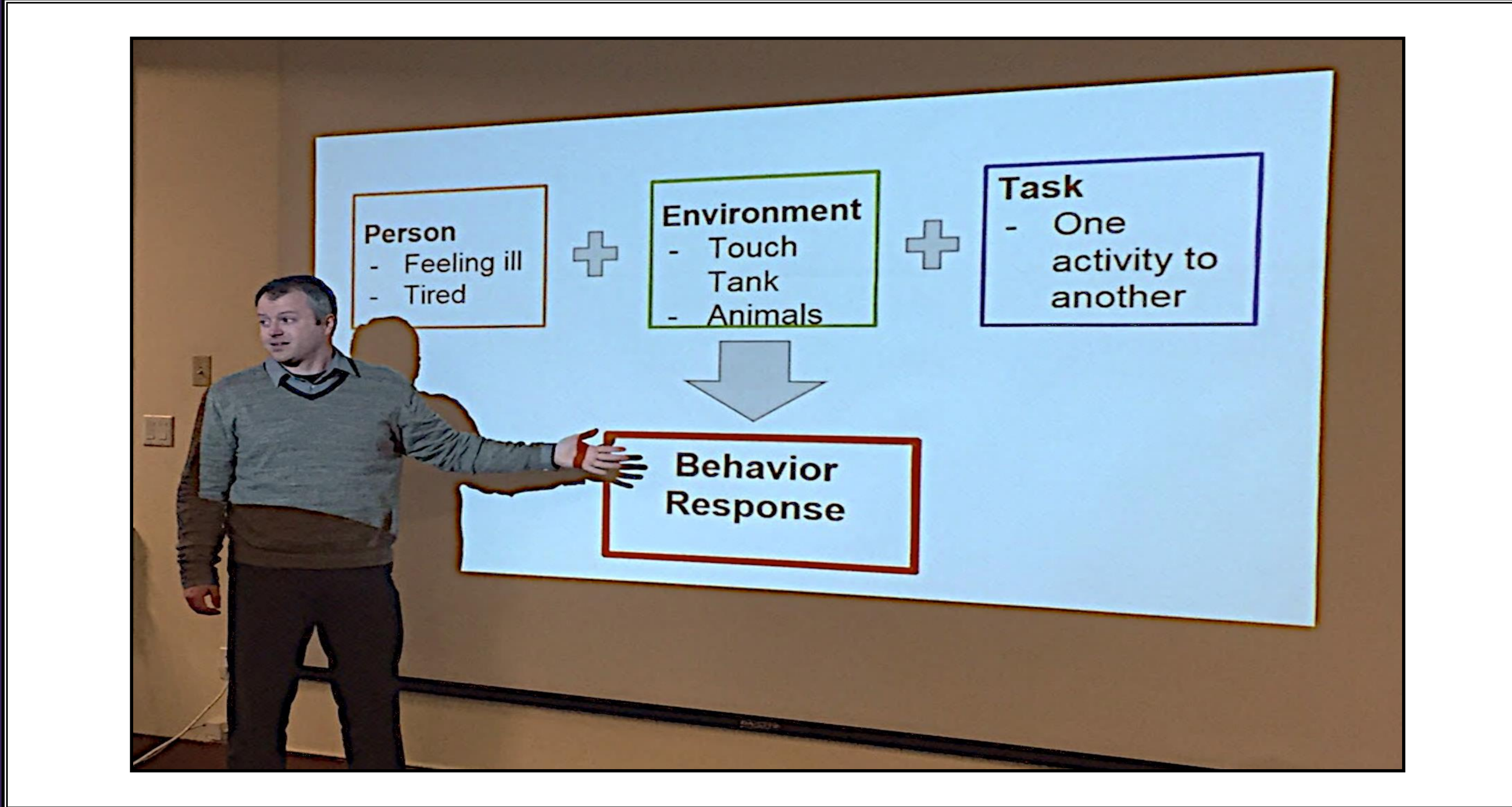
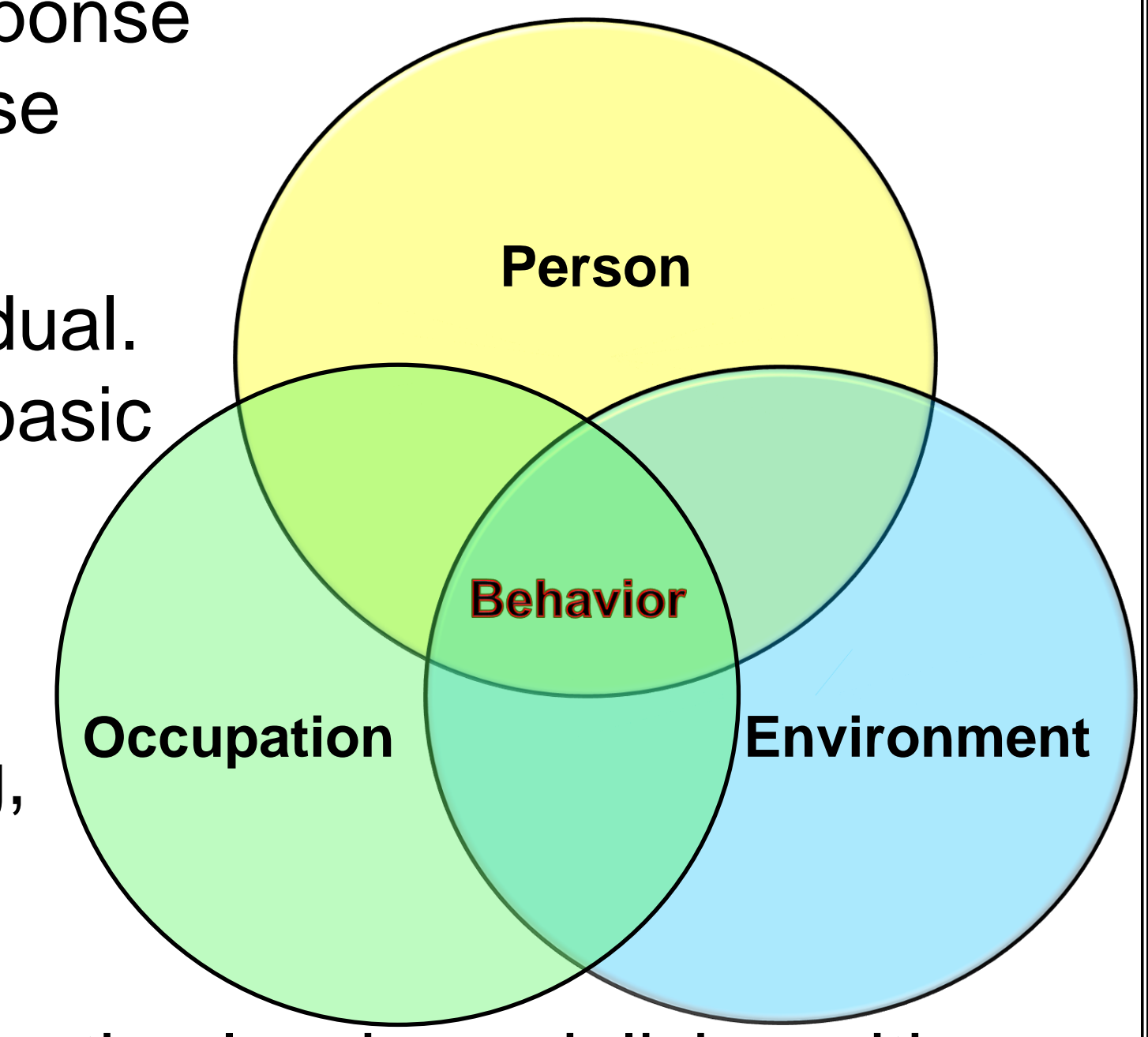
The Seattle Aquarium offers a unique and unstructured learning opportunity to over 800,000 visitors each year.¹ The purpose of the project was to develop and implement a staff training and informational handouts to improve the Seattle Aquarium staffs' ability to manage volunteers and activity programming both within the Seattle Aquarium and in the greater community. The training module included guidance on general communication principles, active listening techniques, an analysis of factors that influence behavior, and suggestions for working with children and adults with unique sensory needs.



PERSON ENVIRONMENT OCCUPATION (PEO) MODEL

Three factors combine to elicit a behavior response in an individual. Changing one or more of these factors can alter the behavioral response.²

Person: The attributes that makeup an individual. For example: age, physical ability, cognition, basic everyday needs (e.g. hunger, energy level).
Environment: The context within which an occupation takes place. Cultural norms, size, sensory stimulation (e.g. temperature, lighting, sounds, seating arrangement, proximity to others, etc.).
Occupation: The task being performed (e.g. eating lunch, socializing with peers, interacting with exhibits).



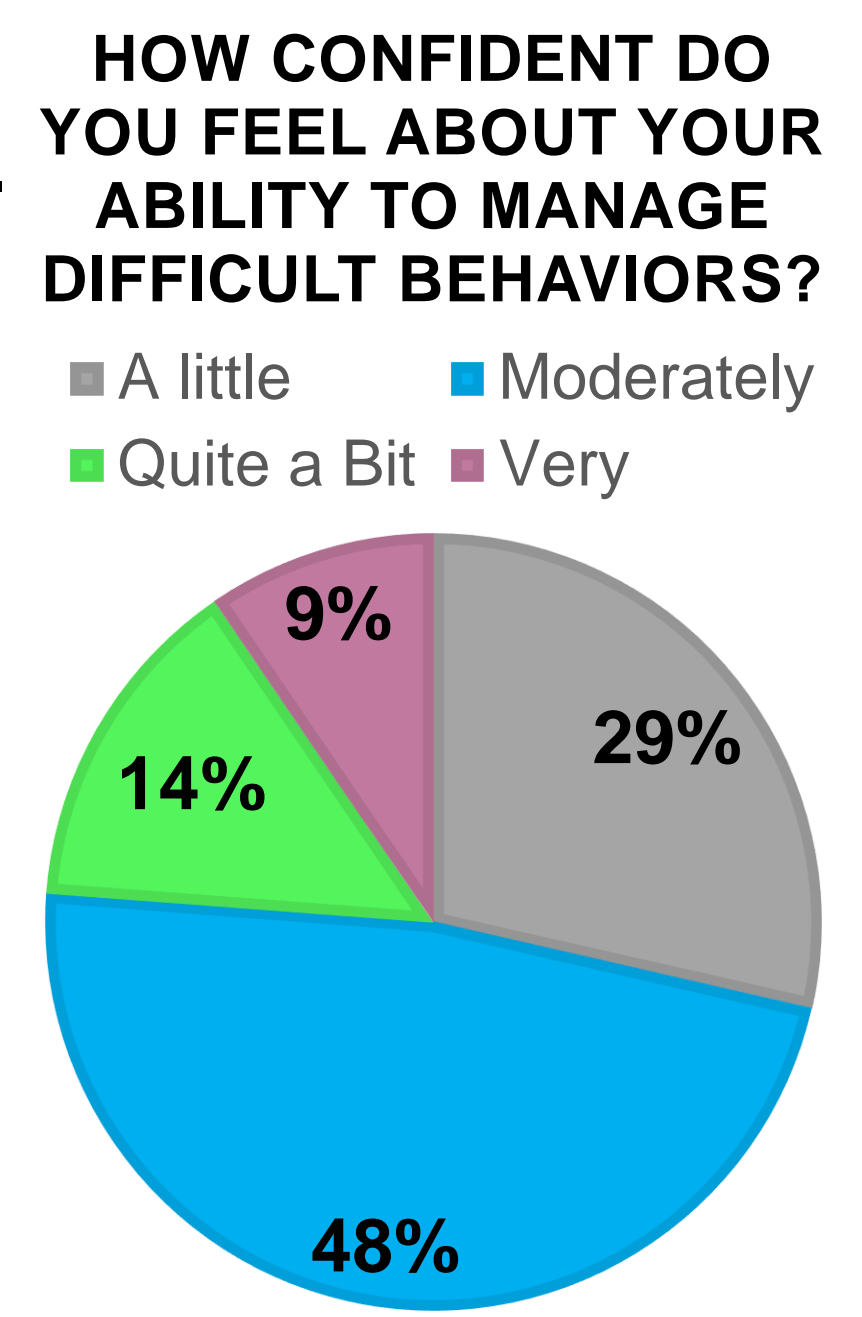
METHODS & RESULTS OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Community Mentor Interview: Spoke with Community Mentor to narrow the focus of the proposal.

Staff Survey: 20 staff members completed an online survey to identify areas of potential growth.

Focus Group: 10 staff members participated in a discussion around how OT can benefit their facility.

Classroom Observation: Observed an onsite aquarium classroom session.



SKILLS OF ACTIVE LISTENING



Pay Attention: Be focused and present, attend to the other person's verbal and nonverbal cues, use open body language, and show interest.

Withhold Judgment: Be open to different ideas. The goal is to understand the other person's point of view, not to argue, criticize, or persuade. Be empathetic, patient, and indicate your willingness to listen.

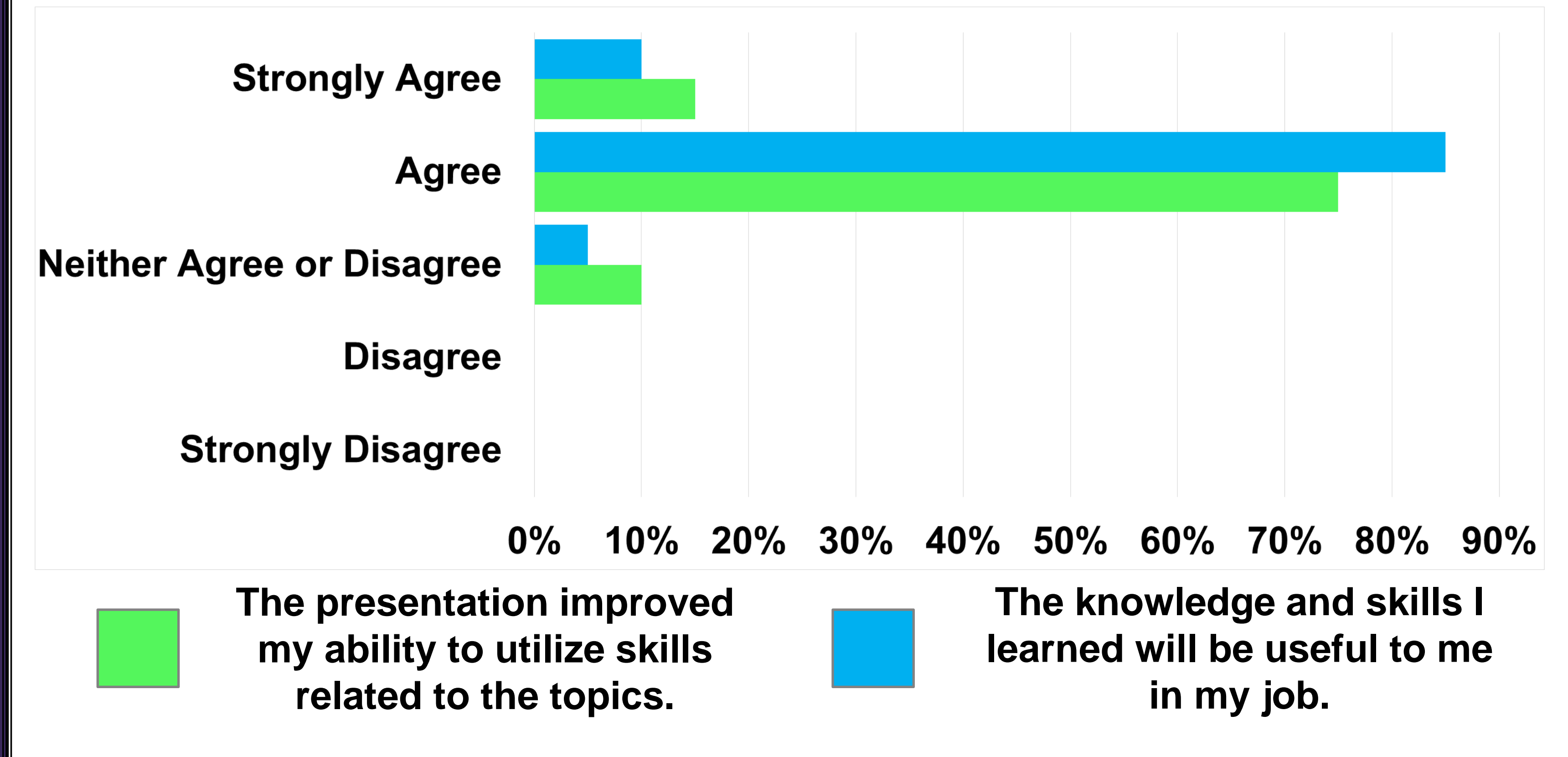
Reflect: Use paraphrasing to quickly summarize the other person's main points. Try to identify the feelings accompanying the content of the message (e.g. "Sounds like you're having doubts about...").

Clarify: Check in about ambiguous or unclear information. Do this by asking open-ended questions to draw out more information or use clarifying questions to ensure understanding (e.g. "Are you talking about...?").

Summarize: Briefly re-state the core themes and ideas shared by the other person. Do this in your own words and throughout the conversation.

Share: After first gaining a clear understanding of the other person's perspective, introduce your own views and collaborate on next steps.³

STAFF TRAINING FEEDBACK



AQUARIUM STAFF TRAINING

Seattle Aquarium staff and volunteers were provided with a two-hour presentation focusing on communication principles and behavior management strategies.

- Content Included:**
- Principles of communication; including verbal & non-verbal forms
 - Strategies for communicating with children, teens, & parents
 - Active listening techniques
 - Analyzing factors that influence behavior using the PEO model
 - Behavior management strategies specific to arousal modulation

REFERENCES

1. Quick Facts. (2013). Retrieved May 18, 2015, from <https://www.seattleaquarium.org/quick-facts>.
2. Law, M., Cooper, B., Strong, S., Stewart, D., Rigby, P., & Letts, L. (1996). The Person-Environment-Occupation Model: A transactive approach to occupational performance. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 63(1), 9-23.
3. Hoppe, M. H. (2006). *Active listening: Improve your ability to listen and lead*. Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership.