
GROUND RULES FOR EFFECTIVE GROUPS¹

Ground Rule #1: TEST ALL ASSUMPTIONS AND INFERENCES

Explicitly check to be sure that others mean what you think that they mean by their words, attitudes, and behavior.

Ground Rule #2: SHARE RELEVANT INFORMATION

Each group member shares all information they possess including that which may not support their own position.

Ground Rule #3: USE SPECIFIC EXAMPLES AND AGREE ON WHAT IMPORTANT WORDS MEAN

Generate valid data by sharing specific stories including who, what, where, etc. Make sure that everyone understands how important words are being used.

Ground Rule #4: EXPLAIN YOUR REASONING AND INTENT

Your Reasoning is what led you to take action; your Intent is your purpose for taking that action.

Ground Rule #5: FOCUS ON INTERESTS, NOT POSITIONS

Interests are the needs, desires, and concerns that members have regarding the situation. Positions are how the member wants to achieve his or her interests.

Ground Rule #6: COMBINE ADVOCACY AND INQUIRY

Explain your point of view, ask others about their point of view, and invite questions about your point of view.

Ground Rule #7: JOINTLY DESIGN NEXT STEPS AND WAYS TO TEST DISAGREEMENTS

The group decides together what, when, and how to discuss topics and determines the process for making a decision.

Ground Rule #8: DISCUSS UNDISCUSSABLE ISSUES

Raise issues left ignored or deemed too difficult to discuss. Do so with respect and gentleness.

Ground Rule #9: USE A DECISION-MAKING RULE THAT GENERATES THE LEVEL OF COMMITMENT NEEDED

Use informed free choice in order to increase internal commitment by determining how the group will make its decision.

¹ Schwarz, R. M. (2002). The Skilled Facilitator: A Comprehensive Resource for Consultants, Facilitators, Managers, Trainers, and Coaches. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.