

Box 9.1 EIGHT RULES FOR SUCCESSFUL BRAINSTORMING

1. Be specific about the purpose and the topic of the brainstorming session.
2. Never criticize an idea, no matter how weird, unconventional, or improbable it might sound. Instead, try to figure out how the idea might be applied to the task at hand.
3. Allow only one conversation at a time and ensure that everyone has an opportunity to speak.
4. Allocate enough time to complete the brainstorming session.
5. Engage all participants in the discussion; sometimes this might require “silent brainstorming” techniques such as asking everyone to be quiet for five minutes and write down their key ideas on 3×5 cards and then discussing what everyone wrote down on their cards.
6. Try to include one or more “outsiders” in the group to avoid groupthink and stimulate divergent thinking. Recruit astute thinkers who do not share the same body of knowledge or perspective as other group members but have some familiarity with the topic.
7. Write it down! Track the discussion by using a whiteboard, an easel, or sticky notes.
8. Summarize key findings at the end of the session. Ask the participants to write down their key takeaway or the most important thing they learned on a 3×5 card as they depart the session. Then, prepare a short summary and distribute the list to the participants (who may add items to the list) and to others interested in the topic (including those who could not attend).