

'In this magnificently practical book, Simon Dowling unpacks the science of collaboration and makes it an art.'

—Dr Jason Fox, behavioural scientist and best-selling author of *How to Lead a Quest*

SIMON DOWLING

# work with me

How to get people to  
buy into your ideas



WILEY

# work with me

How to get people to  
buy into your ideas

SIMON DOWLING

WILEY

First published in 2016 by John Wiley & Sons Australia, Ltd  
42 McDougall St, Milton Qld 4064  
Office also in Melbourne

Typeset in 11/13 pt Sabon LT Std

© 2engage Pty Ltd 2016

The moral rights of the author have been asserted

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication data:

---

Creator:	Dowling, Simon, author.
Title:	Work with Me: how to get people to buy into your ideas / Simon Dowling.
ISBN:	9780730330059 (pbk.) 9780730330073 (ebook)
Notes:	Includes index.
Subjects:	Executive coaching. Leadership. Employee motivation. Teams in the workplace. Psychology, Industrial.
Dewey Number:	658.4071245

---

All rights reserved. Except as permitted under the *Australian Copyright Act 1968* (for example, a fair dealing for the purposes of study, research, criticism or review), no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, communicated or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior written permission. All inquiries should be made to the publisher at the address above.

Cover design by Wiley

Cover image © aomvector/Shutterstock

Internal artwork by Linden Duck

Printed in Singapore by C.O.S. Printers Pte Ltd

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

### Disclaimer

The material in this publication is of the nature of general comment only, and does not represent professional advice. It is not intended to provide specific guidance for particular circumstances and it should not be relied on as the basis for any decision to take action or not take action on any matter which it covers. Readers should obtain professional advice where appropriate, before making any such decision. To the maximum extent permitted by law, the author and publisher disclaim all responsibility and liability to any person, arising directly or indirectly from any person taking or not taking action based on the information in this publication.

# About the author

Simon Dowling is a leading thinker on creating collaborative teams and workplaces.

His passion for team dynamics started when he led a double life: during the day he was a commercial lawyer in a big city firm and at night he was a performer in improvised comedy shows, including the hit TV show *Thank God You're Here*. The contrast between these two worlds was what spurred him to go it alone in his own practice so he could help others pair the technical skills of negotiating agreement with a sense of play, engagement and, most importantly, action!

Based in Melbourne, Australia, Simon now works with senior leaders and their teams as a mentor and coach, and is a highly sought-after national speaker. His clients are like a variety show bag, ranging from funky start-ups and tech companies to banks, government agencies, educational institutions and elite sporting clubs.

Simon continues to admire the way a great improvisation company can come together and create compelling scenes and stories for its audiences without a hint of a script—the essence of true collaboration.

When not working with people or presenting at conferences, Simon can be found hanging out at one of Melbourne's many cafés and coffee hotspots, or at the beach with his family, assessing the surf conditions (waiting for the perfect wave, of course).

[simondowling.com.au](http://simondowling.com.au)

# Acknowledgements

Writing this book has been an incredible privilege. In truth, it couldn't have happened without the support of a whole army of wonderful people. I'd like to take a moment to thank them.

I start with my amazing wife, Amanda. Amanda's the one who gave me her buy-in (at so many levels) and who held the fort while I bunkered down to write. She's been my number one cheer squad throughout the project, and I will always be hers. Our two amazing kids—Sophie and Samuel—were so patient as Daddy spent most of the summer holidays obsessing with his book, even when the beach seemed like a much better idea. Thanks guys, I love you heaps.

Thank you to all my family and friends. Aside from all those supportive 'how's your book going?' conversations, you might be surprised how often I've pictured you as I rewrote a vexing paragraph or sentence. Having you in my mind helped me to say what I wanted to say.

A huge thanks to those who challenged me to write this in the first place, and pushed me to—and then through—a place of doubt and discomfort. Matt Church, Peter Cook and Lynne Cazaly were all instrumental in helping me to just write the freakin' thing. Thanks also to David Simpson, who helped me keep a detached calmness as I entered the fray.

I also want to acknowledge those who played an important role in shaping my thinking on the topic of this book, even though it was many years ago now. Thank you to Eliezer Kornhauser, Jonny Schauder, Sandy Caspi Sable and Shawn Whelan for the many hours of debate and discussion.

Finally, I've been blessed to have an amazing team of people working with me on this project: Kelly Irving, my editor extraordinaire; Linden Duck for his cool sketches; Nicole Bailey and Amy Rockman for their incredible support at HQ; the guys at Glovers Station who ensured my coffee cup runneth over; and of course the dedicated team at Wiley—Lucy Raymond, Chris Shorten, Jem Bates, Ingrid Bond, Theo Vassili and all those behind the scenes. To you all I say, thank you!

# Foreword

## by Sheila Heen

You get really good at what you do. Your skills and background knowledge and experience make your work valuable. Your input sought. You hit your stride.

Then you get promoted to ‘leadership.’ Suddenly you’re not in control of everything anymore. You’re overwhelmed. You try to do as much as you can yourself. But now you’re the bottleneck. You delegate to others and try to ‘mentor’ them and you are accused of micro-managing. You try leaving them alone, and they complain you need to show more leadership. To top it all off, you get put in charge of a change effort and six months in, nobody’s changing.

It’s a paradox at the heart of leadership, of negotiation, of getting things done: sometimes getting traction requires treading more lightly. We have to let go of *getting* people on board, and instead invite them aboard.

Simon offers us the essential ingredients — mindsets and skills for how to invite people on board, whether it’s your spouse, your kids, your colleagues or your clients. In clear, engaging terms he points out the assumptions that can get us stuck, the common mistakes we all make, and a handful of practical techniques for engaging others’ interest, passion, and commitment.

He had me on board from the first page. And long after the last page he has me using his advice. That's the highest compliment I can give a book.

**Sheila Heen**

Co-author of *Thanks for the Feedback* and *Difficult Conversations*

Cambridge, Massachusetts



# Prologue

*Go to the people. Live with them. Learn from them.  
Love them. Start with what they know. Build with what  
they have. But with the best leaders, when the work is  
done, the task accomplished, the people will  
say 'We have done this ourselves.'*

**Lao Tzu, the founder of Taoism**

Imagine if each of your ideas, initiatives or projects was a book on a shelf in a bookstore. Would anyone pick it up? Would they fork out the cash to purchase a copy? Would they even read it? More importantly would they act on the things they'd learned there? Would they take it back to their teams, colleagues and friends, and start a conversation about it? Would they put it on their own bookshelf or post selfies on Instagram of them reading it? Would they buy extra copies to give to their friends? Would people bang on your door, asking to work with you on writing the sequel?

We've all got ideas we want others to buy into.

Whether it's a new initiative, a project or even a way of life, we want people to jump on board and support us wholeheartedly and see our idea through to fruition. We need other people's cooperation, their commitment and their energy. We need them to smile, jump in and ask, 'Where do I sign up?' This infectious enthusiasm and dedication to see the job through to the end is exactly what it means to build buy-in.

Buy-in matters. Buy-in is the thing that makes and drives highly engaged, creative and motivated teams. As you've no doubt experienced before, without buy-in, projects and ideas

falter or fail to even get off the ground. Without buy-in, managers are forced to crack whips or find ever juicier carrots to dangle in front of their team to get them to take action. Without buy-in, your ideas will come crashing down around you. Exorbitant costs, wasted money, squandered time and resources are all dangerous consequences of the inability to build buy-in effectively.

*So how do you get others to buy into your ideas—to work with you?*

Over the past couple of decades, I've had the good fortune to work with people from a wide variety of backgrounds—senior executives, tech geeks, elite sporting teams, government officials, lawyers, health professionals and salespeople. One thing that's clear to me is that although everyone's situation, ideas and context will differ, the challenge of building buy-in is not a technical one; it's a human one. *How do I connect with this person? How do I help them to see things differently? How can I make sense of their concerns? How do I foster a sense of trust? What can I do to convince them to take action?*

Answering these kinds of questions comes more naturally to some people than to others. After all, each of us has been forging our own approach since we first tried to convince the other kids in the schoolyard to trade football cards with us.

What many of us *don't* get is an opportunity to formally learn the skills required to build buy-in. Skills such as influencing, negotiating, persuading, collaborating and problem solving. As we build up our pool of technical knowledge—in whatever domain that may be—there is a presumption that we've got the rest covered. But that ain't necessarily so. These are skills that need to be learned.

This book will show you how to master the gentle art of buy-in. It will equip you with the skills to:

- become a true catalyst of change
- foster the mindset of a champion of buy-in

- design an approach that accounts for the complexity of the modern organisation
- build relationships of trust that will underpin your quest for buy-in
- set the mood and create an emotional *bias to yes* in your target audience
- overcome objections and resistance
- build genuine agreement and commitment
- convert buy-in into meaningful long-term change.

I'm a practical guy, so this book has lots of practical ideas and exercises at the end of each chapter so you can stop and apply what you're learning in the real world.

Each chapter builds on the ones before it, so I recommend you work your way through them in sequence. My hope is that you return to chapters that interest you or, when you're stuck, for inspiration and help at any point on the buy-in journey.

I wrote *Work with Me* because I'm a big believer in what can be achieved when you spark the energy of others. It's in this way that I hope to spark yours. By the time you reach the end of the book, you should feel a renewed sense of confidence and the courage to be a true champion of buy-in. To be someone who takes their power not from their position or authority, but from their ability to engage others and generate true, authentic buy-in. If you ask me, we need more people like that in the world.

So what do you say—*are you in?*

# Contents

<i>About the author</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>Foreword by Sheila Heen</i>	<i>xv</i>
<i>Prologue</i>	<i>xvii</i>
<b>Part I: Get Ready</b>	<b>1</b>
1 SHIFT: Choose the power of buy-in	3
2 MINDSET: Imagine what's possible	15
3 CONVICTION: Establish a 'Big So What'	31
4 WHO: Think wide, act narrow	43
5 TIMING: Read the conditions, ride the wave	59
6 YOU: Be someone they'll listen to	71
<b>Part II: Go</b>	<b>93</b>
7 MOOD: Make them <i>feel</i> it	95
8 MIND: Give them a reason	117
9 MOVEMENT: Convert to sustained action	137
Roadmap for buy-in	157
Where to now?	161
<i>Epilogue</i>	<i>163</i>
<i>Notes</i>	<i>165</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>169</i>

**PART I**

# **Get Ready**

The path to buy-in begins well before you sit down at the proverbial table and pitch your idea. First, there's important work to be done: both on yourself, and on understanding the bigger picture. Before we can 'Go!', we need to 'Get Ready'.

Abraham Lincoln once famously stated, 'Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.'

Let's get sharpening ...

## CHAPTER 1

# SHIFT

## Choose the power of buy-in

*Let's be the first to send a man to the moon.*

*Let's make cameras digital.*

*Let's set up a network of private drivers who'll take people wherever they want to go.*

*We need \$250 000 and four new staff to upgrade our customer database system.*

*We should trial driverless cars.*

*I need management to support a 5 per cent pay rise for my team next year.*

*Darling, I'd really like to have another child.*

*Let's make another Police Academy movie!*

Every one of these ideas needed the instigator to bring other people willingly and enthusiastically on board to breathe life into it. Each required some careful persuasion, a lot of negotiation and probably some persistent nagging, but the outcome couldn't be a reluctant 'All right, do what you want'.

To be successful, the outcome had to be ‘I’m with you on this... Let’s do it... Sign me up’. Head and heart had to be on board and action had to follow closely behind.

In your own organisation, you probably hear comments like these every day:

- ‘I know what it will take to improve team performance.’
- ‘I know how to improve our product so we’ll get fewer customer complaints.’
- ‘We know what our new strategic direction needs to look like.’
- ‘I know how marketing can better support us in the field.’
- ‘I know what we need to do to stop losing market share.’
- ‘We know why morale is low and what to do about it.’
- ‘I know how to make sure everyone puts their cup in the dishwasher.’

Yet how many of these ‘I know’ statements make it from idea to implementation? Too often they are accompanied by an exasperated ‘If only I could get others to think or feel the same way’.

**A great idea will stay just that—an idea—unless you can get others to work with you to turn it into a reality.**

This is especially true in the context of the modern organisation, where your idea is competing for attention with hundreds, perhaps thousands, of others.

Politicians need us to buy into their policies and vision in the same way that senior executives need their shareholders to buy into the vision of their organisation. Managers need the buy-in of their teams, while team members need the buy-in of people across the business to implement new ideas and projects. The implications of getting this wrong are too great to ignore.



## The cost of getting it wrong

In his book *Leading Change*, renowned thought leader John Kotter reports that 70 per cent of change initiatives fail. That's a lot of wasted money, time, energy and resources—not to mention the sheer frustration! One reason for this type of failure is a lack of buy-in from the people needed to bring that change to life.

In 2005 Australian airline Qantas learned this the hard way when its leadership team announced it was introducing a new parts management system called *Jetsmart*. Things did not go smoothly for the senior leaders, who were heavily criticised for failing to engage with engineers, operational staff and unions. As a result, Jetsmart (nicknamed 'Dumbjet' by Qantas engineers) became mired in endless disputes and problems, all of which took place in the public spotlight. Three years and \$40 million later, Qantas announced that it would retire Jetsmart and start over.<sup>1</sup>

The costs associated with a lack of buy-in from the relevant stakeholders and parties can be catastrophic.

Here are some more examples to get you thinking:

- In 2014, the product development team in a company I was working with had created a very nifty piece of software designed to help its customers manage their account with the company. The software promised to make customers' lives easier and to help retain customers. Yet the only way to get customers to use the software was for the sales team to introduce them to it. Despite promises to the contrary, the folks in sales simply weren't signing customers up for the tool. The software sat on a shelf gathering dust, while tensions between product developers and the sales team quickly escalated.