

'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



I cannot remember the last time I read a book, each and every word, from start to finish in one sitting. This is that book. There are so many useful and reflective insights, tips and exercises, that I am now going back to page one to read it all again.

— **Mel Dunn**, Vice President,  
International Development, AECOM

Simon is amazing at what he does, and this book is like having all his wisdom in your pocket. *Work with Me* is absolutely full of brilliant advice that will guide you to true collaboration.

— **Cyan Ta'eed**, Executive Director  
and Co-Founder, Envato

True leadership is not to be found in the best ideas or the most thorough preparation but in our capacity to drive influence, to build buy-in, to create a sense of willing participation in enthusiastic followers. *Work with Me* is an invitation to all of us to be more engaging leaders.

— **Dan Gregory**, CEO, The Impossible Institute, and  
co-author of *Selfish, Scared & Stupid*

Simon has worked with our leadership team during periods of transformative change. His approach is a rare and powerful combination of practical, authentic and creative, and he has a true skill in coaching leaders to focus on what is really important as they lead their teams through change. Simon knows how to engage and influence, while keeping a razor sharp focus on accountability and outcomes. I'd recommend this book to anyone wanting to step up in their career and have more impact and influence, as Simon knows what gets results.

— **Linda Brown**, CEO, Laureate  
International Universities Australia

If you want your ideas to get traction, you should read *Work with Me*. You will thank Simon for deconstructing the proven approaches for achieving buy in and bestowing you with a handy set of influencing super powers.

— **Ben Ross**, General Manager – Design & User Experience, MYOB

Building advocacy is the big idea of collaboration. It's beyond motivation, it's bigger than inspiration and takes way more than communication. *Work with Me* is the book we all need in the decade of disruption.

— **Matt Church**, Founder, Thought Leaders Global, and author of *Amplifiers*

In today's business environment, buy-in skills are more critical than ever to ensure our people are engaged and heading in the same direction. Simon Dowling's *Work with Me* provides a clear, common sense and highly readable guide on 'how to build genuine buy-in' that is suitable for staff at all levels.

— **Denice Pitt**, CEO, Online Education Services Pty Ltd

Simon presents his ideas in clear and practical ways. This book is full of useful tips for every aspiring leader looking to improve effectiveness and be a catalyst for change. Simon encourages self-reflection to instill learnings and create permanent and positive behavioural change. A must read for all leaders.

— **John Hall**, Managing Director, Ricoh Australia Pty Ltd

In this magnificently practical book, Simon Dowling unpacks the science of collaboration and makes it an art. Read this to unlock profound new savviness in your quest to build buy-in.

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

*Work with Me* is a practical but comprehensive guide for anyone who wants to help their team succeed. Simon's holistic, authentic approach to workplace communication will unlock the potential of your workforce.

— Denise Heath, CEO, NADO Inc.

Simon Dowling has been instrumental in helping us build high performing leadership teams. His approach is practical, and centered around the fundamental themes of collaboration, relationships and transparency. If you have any aspiration around implementing strategy, driving change or getting any idea off the ground, then you need people to buy-in. If you want to know how to make this happen, and why it really matters, then you need to read this book!

— Alexandra Tullio, Executive,  
Bendigo & Adelaide Bank

Collaboration hinges on people's ability to reach out and work with one another — regardless of role title and rank. Simon has written the quintessential guide for doing just that. Not only does *Work with Me* provide us with a rich set of ideas and practical tips for building genuine buy-in, it rallies us all to foster a culture where buy-in is the norm. Organisations that get this bit right are destined to win the long-term game. *Work with Me* is a must read for anyone wanting to achieve success in an uncertain future.

— Janine Garner, Founder & Director, LBD Group



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How to get people to  
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SIMON DOWLING

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# 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).

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# 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.

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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.

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# 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?*