

everything to me. I realised that he is willing to muck in if he's told what to do, and that part of me doesn't trust him to do things properly. Even then, after he'd packed the children's clothes, I counted their T-shirts to make sure he'd packed enough.'

Still some way to go, then – but a marked improvement. 'It takes time to build trust,' Myerscough adds, 'but Helen needs to let go of the fact that she takes care of everything. Is it really so bad if they have to buy extra T-shirts when they're away?'

says Diane. Myerscough observes, 'Diane was trying to trick Paul into doing what she wanted, which wasn't helping anyone.'

So Diane booked a night out, which boosted their feelings of coupleness. Although Paul has yet to arrange a 'date', he has greeted Diane's other plans for nights out with enthusiasm. 'It's made me realise it doesn't really matter who arranges things,' she says. But, when her next birthday approaches, Diane plans to drop very big hints.

Adriana calmly reminded him that she doesn't go out often and would appreciate his support when she does. 'He took that on board. Then we talked about his working day and that it would benefit all of us – him included – if he could leave on time.' He's still not quite the patron saint of punctuality, but Adriana says, 'things are much better and, best of all, there's a calmer atmosphere at home.'

Visit Michael Myerscough's website at therelationshipgym.com

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Break your ROW RUT

KEEP ARGUING ABOUT THE SAME OLD THINGS, IN THE SAME WAY? WHETHER YOU SCREAM OR SULK, THERE IS A WAY TO PUT YOURSELVES BACK TOGETHER

WORDS FIONA GIBSON

You're in the midst of a row when you're hit with a feeling of déjà vu. Hang on a minute, you've had this argument before – countless times. 'I call it the forty-year argument,' says relationship coach Michael Myerscough. 'It can be about something that seems small – like one of you always brings the car back with no petrol in it – and ends up in a huge row with nothing being resolved.' Frustrating? Just a bit. Yet, according to Myerscough, recurring rows are relatively easy to fix. Trained in a new therapy from the US, called Relational Life Therapy, he focuses on the dynamics between a couple, figuring out how they can do things differently once and for all. He works with a 'relationship grid' (see below) comprising four positions, one of which almost everyone assumes mid-fight.

Try it – it works. Only yesterday, my husband and I had a spat over one of our pet hot spots: whether to have a day out (my choice) or relax at home (his). 'Fine, we'll stay home,' I barked, storming off to my study (and the grid's top left quarter). 'The biggest favour you can do yourself is figure out your position, then resolve to do things differently,' Myerscough says. 'So, if you tend to clam up and shut down, try yelling for a change. The instant you step out of your normal grid position, the argument has to go somewhere else.' Sounds too simple to work, so we challenged four *Red* readers stuck in an argument rut to test the theory. ●

WHAT'S YOUR ARGUMENT STYLE?

Aloof, shut down

You say: 'I'm too busy to talk to you now.'

You come across: Cold, uncaring.

Switch position by: Remembering your relationship does matter. Making your point without walking away.

Explosive, attacking

You say: 'You're so lazy. How dare you treat me like this?'

You come across: Angry, losing control.

Switch position by: Giving yourself time to calm down. Not going on the attack.

Crushed, inert

You say: 'You don't care, but then why would I expect anything better?'

You come across: Sorry for yourself.

Switch position by: Reminding yourself that you – and your opinions – count.

Tearful, needy

You say: 'Now you've ruined everything!'

You come across: Whining, manipulative.

Switch position by: Anticipating your flashpoints. Being proactive about finding a solution.