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Why Do We Fight? Blame It on Our Brains.

By KATHERINE ROSMAN

My husband is smart. Super smart. Like, not only does he devour fat history books, but he can talk about them in an engaging manner that's neither stuffy nor oversimplified. He's good with numbers, too. And he knows the meaning of Latin root words -- a big turn-on to a crossword-puzzle addict like me. (He had me at *salve*.)



Lars Leetaru

I love his brain. It's Joe's dominant quadrants I could do without. Recently, I got absolutely walloped by his lower left.

* * *

The fight was among the dumbest we've ever had because we weren't in disagreement.

We were driving to yoga class on a Saturday when I glanced at my iPhone. There was a note from a friend

whose daughter is in a play group with our daughter. My neighbor let me know that the price -- the parents pay a retired Montessori teacher to lead the group as well as for supplies and snacks -- was going up for the summer session. I looked up from my phone and told Joe that "the Little School," as we call it, was going to be a bit more expensive.

"How much more?" he asked.

"I don't know, but not much," I answered.

"What do you base that presumption on?" he asked.

"My sense of things, having talked a lot with the other moms," I said.

"In other words, you have no idea," he said.

"No, I do have an idea," I said. "My idea is that it won't be a big increase."

"Right, otherwise known as having no idea," he said. Then he added, "One other question, what's the extra money for?"

I didn't answer. We drove in silence for about five minutes. Then I spoke: "Do you have a problem

with our paying more for the Little School?"

"There is virtually no amount that I can imagine being called for that I would have a problem with," he said. "The Little School is worth every dime."

"Then what is the issue?" I huffed.

"The issue is, I still would like to know the specifics," he said, exasperated.

The Little School is something I had a big hand in setting up, something I'm very proud of. Joe knows this. He said he wasn't even worried about the increase. Yet he badgered.

I seethed in downward-facing dog.

After class, Joe got mad that I was still mad. It would be hours before we spoke to each other again.

* * *

Earlier that week, Joe had spent a few days at a business conference at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania.

"I got my personality tested today," he told me when he called from the hotel after a day of seminars and meetings.

"Did it get a passing grade?" I asked. (One of us thought that was pretty funny.)

One of the things that makes my husband a great guy, and a smart person, is that he is always integrating lessons from one part of life into another. The day after the Little School blow-up had blown over, Joe said to me, "I think we have very different dominant brain quadrants and when we fight, that's getting in our way." Then he reached into his briefcase and pulled out a folder.

It was from Personality School!

He began to set on the kitchen counter graphs and charts, the results of a Herrmann International brain dominance survey.

These brain analysis surveys are meant to identify which segments of a person's brain -- the part that controls rational thinking versus that in which we process conceptual ideas, for example -- kick into gear in the course of conducting business and when crises erupt.

"Here is how my brain works," Joe said, pointing to a jumble of charts, lines and graphs. He is a big A Quadrant/upper left guy: strong in quantitative, analytical and technical thinking. When he gets stressed, the analysis explained, he gets even more detail-oriented and focused on the sequence of what happened and who said what (B Quadrant/lower left).

If I needed any evidence of his methodical thinking, I might point to the fact that Joe was using a chart to show me why he thinks we got in a fight.

"I've taken it upon myself to conduct an analysis of your brain and you're all upper and lower right," he said. I consulted the chart. This means I think artistically, emotionally and conceptually.

"It doesn't take a rocket scientist to know these things about us," I said, tapping into my own

Quadrant A logic. Joe looked a bit hurt that I was dismissing his PowerPoint presentation. So sensitive.

* * *

I kept thinking about the fight. Joe did, too. Last Friday evening we began to discuss it further. Instead of poring over charts, we poured glasses of wine.

"I felt like you were criticizing me," I said.

"I was asking very straightforward questions," he said.

We were saying what the chart said. In a stressful situation, I got emotional -- and unable to recognize that his questions were reasonable. He got singularly focused on the details. He couldn't see that I was feeling criticized by his peppering me with questions to which I didn't have immediate answers.

Joe and I know how different we are. In the course of daily life, we often consider our individual differences a source of team strength. But when the tension mounts, the differences turn on us and we turn on each other. Maybe recognizing that will help us to be a little more patient.

"I don't know how I feel about drawing marital insight from a chart," I said.

"Technically," he answered, "it's a graph."

I leaned over and kissed Joe on the head. That brain cracks me up.

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