The art of accepting influence:
Researchers found when watching the videotapes of violent men that they never accepted influence from their wives. These men never ever said things to their partners like "Good point", "I never thought of that", "You are starting to convince me", "I never thought of the problem the way you are describing it. That's very helpful", or "Well maybe you're right, maybe my family is a pain in the neck sometimes".

There was no evidence that these men were ever accepting influence from their wives. To almost every attempt by their wives to influence them their reply was, in effect, "NO! You are not going to influence me" or "NO! You are not going to control or manipulate me" or "NO. I am not accepting your point of view." If she said "We really need to communicate better", he'd say "NO WE DON'T. That's YOUR PROBLEM. I don't think that is the issue at all!" Whatever the issue she would bring up he would reject her point of view.

If you are married to someone like that you probably feel a bit like a tennis player playing against that tennis ball machine that just whacks everything right back at you. What we realise in working with men who do not accept influence is that they dread not being in control and having power. Paradoxically, however, controlling and aggressive men have a weak sense of themselves and have to compensate for this with excessive control.

The only way you can have influence and feel that you matter in a relationship is if you can be influenced yourself. That's really how we achieve a sense of significance and power. If you can accept influence on some things then your point of view and perspective becomes meaningful and respected.

There are huge differences between men and women when it comes to accepting influence. Research shows that women accept influence at a very high rate while only about 35% of men readily accept influence from their wives.

This is also the case for small boys and girls. Pre school girls are likely to accept influence equally from little boys and little girls. If a child says, "Let's do this," a little girl is likely to say "Ok". This is not the case with little boys who are more likely to say "No" if it is a little girl and say "Yes" if it a little boy.

Some researchers suggest that the reason that girls and boys stop playing with each other when they get to about seven years old is because girls eventually get fed up of playing with boys who do not want to be influenced. Sound familiar? This is also what goes wrong in many adult relationships.

Accepting influence is not a high level skill. It goes something like this: Lets say the wife says "Are you going to be around for the weekend?" and he says "Not a lot because I have to get this report done for work and it has to be submitted by Tuesday" and she says "Well, I wanted to remind you that we have my mother and family are coming on the weekend and I need you to help out and to be around." If he is rejecting influence he will say something like: "NO WAY! I have to work and I am getting that report done. Deal with your own family for God's sake". He just bats back the request.

Accepting influence looks like this: When she says "Well, I wanted to remind you that we have my mother and family coming on the weekend and I need you to help out and to be around."   He just says something as simple and as uncomplicated as "OK".

So this is not a high level skill we are talking about. He will go on to come up with some other solutions like "OK well how about I work on Sunday after they have left" etc. The problem gets solved with the giving and accepting of influence.

In couples counselling we talk about "No fault discussion". These are conversations that couples have to have that are not geared toward finding fault or blame but only on finding solutions.   Most couples in conflict spend a lot of time arguing about whose fault something is. What you have to do is forget about fault and let go of past resentments.

To have a no fault discussion you are not allowed to try to figure out the cause of the problem or the level of blame each should take for the problem. You are only allowed to focus on future solutions.   Try it. I bet you will find that many of your arguments serve no other function than just trying to attribute blame.