Guilt Versus Shame: One Is Productive, the Other Isn’t, and How to Tell Them Apart

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The Wall Street Journal:

When Russell Robinson visited his mother recently, she made a request: Would he please attend an important family event 75 miles away that was happening the next day, the ordination ceremony of his aunt, who was becoming a minister.

Dr. Robinson, a 44-year-old professor of mass communication who is divorced and lives in Durham, N.C., told his mother he would like to go but had made plans to spend the weekend with his 7-year-old son, who was visiting.

Dr. Robinson’s mom persisted. “Family members are expected to attend,” she said. He said he understood, but it was too late for him to change the plans with his son. She asked again. He declined again.

Then his mom turned up the heat. “Fine, don’t go,” she told him. “I understand that you have your own life—even if we are your family.”

“She was trying to make me feel bad,” says Dr. Robinson. It worked.

Read the whole story: The Wall Street Journal