

SAM AND BONNIE RECHTER FELLOWSHIP

Research Report

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A Leader-centric Examination of the Effects of Motivating Followers via Pep Talks

Leaders in organizations often struggle to stay energized and suffer from burnout. Despite the need to better understand how leading—a social process of influence that involves motivating followers—impacts leaders *themselves*, leadership theory and research to date have almost exclusively focused on how leadership affects *followers'* attitudes, emotions, and behaviors. To expand this literature, my research aims to provide an examination of how leadership affects leaders' own subsequent emotions, which I propose have important downstream outcomes for the leader. I identify and focus on one discrete and positive leading behavior in situ, giving a *motivational talk*, which I define as a leader's explicit verbal attempt to positively regulate (i.e., initiate or maintain) followers' motivation toward important work tasks or goals. Specifically, I theorize that, depending on how positively followers respond to leaders' motivational talks, leaders will experience a positive emotion (i.e., pride) or a negative emotion (i.e., shame), which in turn will be differentially associated with their subsequent energy and sense of leader identity. I investigated my theoretical model using a set of complementary studies that employ different methods that offset weaknesses to enhance both internal and external validity.

Study 1, a pilot study consisting of both quantitative and qualitative data, documents two important aspects of motivational talks deployed in the organizational context: (a) the prevalence of motivational talks in organizations and (b) leaders' underlying goals and the types of organizational situations that drive their decision to give motivational talks.

Study 2, a cross-sectional survey of supervisors from various organizations, demonstrated overall support for my model. When followers respond positively to supervisors' motivational talks, supervisors feel pride, which in turn, is positively associated with their energy and leader identity. Conversely, when followers respond negatively, supervisors feel shame, which in turn, is negatively associated with their energy and leader identity.

Study 3, a lab experiment that manipulated (a) leaders' motivational talk giving and (b) followers' response to leaders' motivational talk, showed a similar pattern of findings and thus provided causal support.

Study 4, an experiment employing the critical incident technique wherein real-world supervisors were asked to recall a time when they gave a motivational talk (vs. a transactional talk) that received a positive (vs. negative) response, showed largely consistent findings with previous studies.