

***"If you want to change the world - or the culture - all you have to do is change the conversation. In the beginning was the word -- that was how the Bible started. Asking the question of what is true wealth invites people to have a conversation they may never have had before. That itself is a measure a wealth! The value of our coming together can be measured by whether or not we are able to have a conversation we have not had before. A conversation is an action."***

**-- Peter Block 2007 --**

## **Brain Rats™**

I recently attended a session on engagement facilitated by Peter Block. For me, it was a unique and beneficial learning experience significantly enhanced by the musical genius of Barbara McAfee. Barbara's song, Brain Rats™ held significant meaning for me. Here are the words to the song:

### Chorus:

Brain Rats . . . I've got brain rats  
A pestilential blight upon my mind

Brain rats are the wicked thoughts that prove my every flaw  
And every hopeful notion gives them something new to gnaw  
I hear them chewing in the night and on and off all day  
They've really got my number . . . oh the awful stuff they say

### Chorus

Brain Rats I've got brain rats  
A pestilential blight upon my mind

My mother says she loves me but no doubts she's telling lies  
And friends are all just enemies in ingenious disguise  
There's no one to be trusted and that's including me  
The best approach to human beings is fierce misanthropy

### Chorus

Brain Rats I've got brain rats  
A pestilential blight upon my mind

I need a lot more money than I'll ever live to earn  
And late at night I count my debts as I fret and toss and turn  
I'm one step from the poor house - I can't make it on my own  
I'll be just like that match girl dying cold and all alone

### Chorus

Brain Rats I've got brain rats  
A pestilential blight upon my mind

They torture with such cunning like little Marquises de Sade  
And wreak unstinting havoc beneath my cool facade  
They tell me I'm worse than everyone - my problems can't be solved  
And I'm the piece of crap around which this whole world revolves

Article (2007) copyrighted to Dr. Linda Burrs and/or Step Up To Success!

[DrBurrs@step-up-to-success.org](mailto:DrBurrs@step-up-to-success.org)

[www.step-up-to-success.org](http://www.step-up-to-success.org)

937-866-7511 (Office)

Brain Rats™ words and music is trademarked to Barbara McAfee and is used in this article with permission.

### Chorus

Brain Rats I've got brain rats  
A pestilential blight upon my mind

To hear a clip of the song or to purchase the full version, [please click here](#).

### *What I learned from this song*

Here is how I interpreted the song. I found this message to be an apt way for me to define some of the root causes of my own personal challenges . . . I've got *brain rats*! The song described for me *what brain rats are and what they do; what brain rats say and what their influence leads to and finally how brain rats could eat away at my hopes and dreams*. Brain rats belie the public mask others see.

It seems when I am fearful, worried and overly stressed, I hear the *brain rats* louder and more often. When I take time to explore the emotions in what I am experiencing, I almost always find those *brain rats* are shouting at me with outdated, uninformed and misrepresented concepts that cause me to stumble on my journey.



It is important for me to name my *brain rats* in order to free me from their hold on my psyche. The biggest rat I hear is fear. This particular rodent propagates additional *pests* such as feelings of inadequacy, doubt and incompetence.

*Brain rats* thrive on telling the same story over and over again. These *mental rodents* seem energized by my inability to change my conversation because of my fear of exposure. They need for me to keep silent about who they are and how they influence how I feel about myself. According to the author of the song, *brain rats* thrive on secrecy and on being taken VERY seriously. Exposing them in such a light-hearted, irreverent way (the song) lifts the veil of secrecy and is beneficial to people getting free of their power.

When I replace self-pity with self-confidence, the *pestilential blight* upon my mind weakens and eventually fades away. If I ask myself the hard questions that help me get where I want to be versus continuing to exist in my current state, I am holding myself accountable for my condition and eliminating the chatter of the *brain rats*. I can then change what happens in my space by changing my perceptions and therefore my reality for the type of future I want. As long as I allow my current perceptions to look for and find evidence that my stories and beliefs are true to the exclusion of every thing else, I remain unchanged while allowing the *brain rats* continue to wreak havoc in my life. If I choose not to challenge my *brain rats*, I give them permission to continue to run rampant and to do what THEY want versus what I want.

### *Organizational Brain Rats*

As an OD strategist, it is important for me to try and put this message into an organizational context. When I consider how organizations function, I am convinced now more than ever that *brain rats* have infested groups, teams and individuals operating in ways that leave the business exposed to competitive threats, entropy and the loss of creativity. The impact of the infestation may be seen in conflict, lack of team spirit and the loss of honest discussions (AKA political correctness).

Brain rats tell us to be selective with whom we interact while at work and to be careful about others who may not share OUR values or beliefs. Evidence of *brain rat* droppings may be found in unresolved conflict, distrust, lack of cooperation, unethical behaviors, lack of engagement, and disrespect for differences.

Article (2007) copyrighted to Dr. Linda Burrs and/or Step Up To Success!

[DrBurrs@step-up-to-success.org](mailto:DrBurrs@step-up-to-success.org)

[www.step-up-to-success.org](http://www.step-up-to-success.org)

937-866-7511 (Office)

Brain Rats™ words and music is trademarked to Barbara McAfee and is used in this article with permission.

### *What to do about the brain rats?*

Whether a decision is made to face the brain rats as an individual or as a team, it is important to rid one self of these hurtful messages. The toxic infestation of *brain rats* demands their influence be eliminated in order to create the life individuals want and deserve. This may not be easily accomplished but it is possible. Here are a few suggestions:

- As Peter Block (2007) suggests, change your conversation. Changing the conversation has the potential for creating a new reality. Instead of focusing so much on what is wrong, try seeing what is right; looks for reasons to celebrate. The change in conversation requires a change in our thinking. This change in thinking provides the impetus for one to silence their *brain rats*.
- Expose the *brain rats* for what they are – messages one has received at some point in time that is repeated over and over again.
- Name your *brain rat*: incompetence, fear, poor self-esteem, etc. While this is similar to **exposing** the culprits, when you give your *brain rats* a specific name, you openly acknowledge this internal conversation. You can now do something specific to improve your current position. The *disinfectant of sunlight* takes the secrecy out the *brain rat's* message and instead gives you power over the brain rats.
- Ask for help. If you do not know what to do or where to begin, don't go it alone . . . don't walk away . . . ask for help.

*Brain rats* do not have to be *permanent pestilential blights* upon our minds. There is power to exterminate *brain rats* by changing the conversation and by holding one self accountable for thoughts and actions. *How will you deal with your brain rats?*

About the author: ***Dr. Linda Burrs and Step Up To Success!***

***Step Up to Success!*** is a consulting firm that focuses on organizational strategies for leaders, teams and individuals resulting in highly committed, highly energized, and high performing teams. For more than 25 years, Dr. Linda Burrs has brought her rich dynamic approach to the corporate and professional coaching and training arena. The breadth of her experience crosses all walks of social and organizational life including law firms, technology organizations, educators, business professionals, leadership groups and non-profit groups.

Dr. Burrs designs and delivers targeted and successful coaching interventions and programs designed to *measurably improve personal, leadership and organizational performance*. Her experience, enthusiasm, and high energy provide the foundation for your memorable, life-changing, inspirational experience. When you attend a Step Up To Success! Program, you walk away with improved communication skills, better self-management skills, enhanced interpersonal skills and a clearer understanding of your individual strengths and how they contribute to your success both organizationally, professionally, and personally.

Linda is the author of the book: *The Fruits of Inclusion™: A Smart Business Guide to Creating a Sustainable Diversity and Inclusion Program* (in press) and has published research and theoretical articles on leadership and organizational effectiveness.

Dr. Burrs may be reached at:  
[DrBurrs@step-up-to-success.org](mailto:DrBurrs@step-up-to-success.org) OR [Linda@DrBurrs.com](mailto:Linda@DrBurrs.com)  
[www.step-up-to-success.org](http://www.step-up-to-success.org) OR [www.DrBurrs.com](http://www.DrBurrs.com)  
937-866-7511 (Office)

Article (2007) copyrighted to Dr. Linda Burrs and/or Step Up To Success!

[DrBurrs@step-up-to-success.org](mailto:DrBurrs@step-up-to-success.org)

[www.step-up-to-success.org](http://www.step-up-to-success.org)

937-866-7511 (Office)

Brain Rats™ words and music is trademarked to Barbara McAfee and is used in this article with permission.

**About the musician: Barbara McAfee**

Barbara McAfee is a keynote speaker, professional singer/songwriter, and voice coach. With 12 years experience as an organizational development consultant and 24 as a professional performer, Barbara works at the intersection of business and creativity.

She brings her wise and sassy music to such clients as Best Buy, Wells Fargo, The Coca-Cola Company, the National Wellness Conference, and most recently, The Women's Leadership Revival Tour with author Meg Wheatley. She also appears regularly with author Peter Block.

Her voice coaching practice focuses on teaching leaders pragmatic ways to access the power of voice and presence. As a self-producing artist, Barbara has recorded 5 CDs.

A native Minnesotan and a graduate of Hamline University (St. Paul), Barbara now lives near the Mississippi River in south Minneapolis.

[www.barbaramcafee.com](http://www.barbaramcafee.com)

Article (2007) copyrighted to Dr. Linda Burrs and/or Step Up To Success!

[DrBurrs@step-up-to-success.org](mailto:DrBurrs@step-up-to-success.org)

[www.step-up-to-success.org](http://www.step-up-to-success.org)

937-866-7511 (Office)

Brain Rats™ words and music is trademarked to Barbara McAfee and is used in this article with permission.