

The last time we were together I talked a little bit about my daughter Katie and her fiancé Junior. We had the pleasure of their company over New Year's this year and always enjoy our time together. Junior is a first generation American, as both of his parents were born in Mexico. They have a strong sense of their heritage and we are learning more about Mexican culture as we get to know him and his family better. One of the things we learned was that in order to have good luck in the upcoming year, you should wear something red when the old year ends and the new year begins.

Even though I am not Mexican, I decided that I could use some good luck in 2011 so I put on a red shirt to wear that night. But I didn't stop there. We have good friends that grew up in the southern part of the United States. Their good luck custom/superstition is to eat black eyed peas on New Year's Day. The soup-like dish typically is made with ham or some type of pork. Every year, they have dropped off several helping of black eyed peas and ham to bring our household good luck for the coming year. Not wanting to take any chances, I make sure I eat that delicious treat every New Year's Day.

When I was growing up in Dubuque, my mom always cooked turkey for our Thanksgiving and Christmas meals, and ham on New Year's Day. Until I did a little research, I didn't really give any thought to that tradition. It turns out that eating ham, because it comes from a hog, and it is considered lucky because owning a hog symbolizes prosperity. I wonder if my mother cooked a ham for that reason or because it was something that my dad liked to eat, and was tired of turkey.

I have also learned that those with Dutch heritage believe that eating donuts on New Year's is good luck. Donuts are circular in nature and many cultures believe that anything in the shape of a ring is good luck because it symbolizes "coming full circle", or completing a new year. In my house son Ted is very superstitious. He likes to have a nap after school on game days; he thinks it helps him play better.

What traditions or superstitions exist in your business? Are they strong traditions that are based in something solid or simply harmless activity that brings your staff together? Most of the traditions start by accident or routine, but in the end they all have to do with attitude. If you are superstitious and something doesn't happen like it should, you probably think the rest of your day will be bad. But the opposite can also be true. As owners and managers of small businesses our superstitions and attitudes are infectious.

I am a firm believer that the leaders in any organization set the tone. People we work with are smart and observe everything. They know our attitude the minute they walk in the door. So no matter what our superstitions, no matter what our attitude we need make sure that the people we work with and the clients we serve see us at our best.

Do any of these superstitions have an effect on have good luck on the coming year, I really don't know, but it's kind of fun to play along as long as we don't take it too seriously and have the right attitude. So as I plan ahead, way ahead, for the next changing of the calendar the menu will be ham, donuts, black eyed peas with ham, all while I am wearing something red.

*Small Business Today is a bi-weekly feature written by Tom Friedman, market president of First National Bank, Ames-Ankeny.*