

With Christmas right around the corner, it is time to get serious about the big day. Setting my religious side aside for a short while (we all know that the real reason to celebrate is not about Santa Claus or the biggest buying time of the year), I thought I would do something I haven't done in years. Make a Christmas wish list. When I was younger I wanted a new baseball bat, game, ice skates or a bicycle. As an adult in my early 50's my list has changed quite a bit.

I am going to share my list with you, not because I expect to receive anything that I list, but simply to make a point. In no particular order, here goes... Successful basketball seasons for both my sons and their teams; lose 15 pounds by Easter; new snow shovel from Ankeny Ace Hardware; updated pictures of my family for my wallet; Captain Morgan Rum, any and all flavors except "Parrot Bay"; a new suit for work; great, inspiring speeches for my upcoming year as Ankeny Chamber of Commerce President; a new briefcase because my current one just broke.

As I examined my list of Christmas wants and wishes, I realized that I could categorize my list into 3 areas; things I want/need, things that were completely out of my control, and some of the things were possible but were going to require a lot of hard work and self-discipline. My next question was who am I supposed to share this list with? I really don't think I should have my teenage boys walking up and down the liquor isles trying to decide which flavor of Captain Morgan to buy for their dad. After 30 years of being married, my lovely wife probably has a better idea of what I want and need than I do. Although I cannot say the same thing about her.

Tired of thinking about that Christmas list, I started thinking in a different direction. What if I could create a Christmas list for my business? What would I want? What do I need? What about other businesses and the people who own and manage those companies, what would they want on their Christmas lists? Here are some of the ideas that came to my mind... More customers; customers who spend more per sale, buy more of our products and services; how about improved efficiencies, in every department; or a line of credit to smooth out cash flow?; everyone could use happy, satisfied, engaged employees.

Then I looked at both lists. There were some common elements, as both lists contained things that would potentially make me happy. But would they provide long term happiness? Some of the items on my personal list might make a long term, happy memory. All the items on my business list would create a positive, long term effect.

The business list looks more like goals for 2012. As business owners and managers we cannot simply hope that Santa will bring us those things and lay them under our tree on Christmas. In order to make that wish list come true, we need to create a plan, and work to make those goals happen. My challenge to you is to make your own list, prioritize it and make a plan to make that list a reality.

With Christmas right around the corner, it is fine to make that wish list and hope that what we receive and what we give brings happiness. But don't forget to give thanks for what we do have and the opportunities that are before us every day. Merry Christmas!

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