

The Magic of the Holidays, Latin-style

By: Veronica Cool ⌚ December 16, 2016



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Biting into a crisp red delicious apple anytime during the holiday season evokes warm memories of celebrating the holidays back home in the Dominican Republic. Apples, figs and nuts were delicacies and treats imported to commemorate the holiest of days throughout the season. These treats added to the feeling of joy and magic that permeated the air.

In most Latin American countries, Christmas is the most significant fiesta, or holiday, to be observed, and not just with a day off from work but a truly festive sentiment across the community – a sentiment that remains deeply embedded in our soul as Latinos migrate to the U.S. and raise our families here.

But Navidad, or Christmas, takes a back seat to Noche Buena, celebrated Dec. 24, where Latino families gather for a tremendous feast and an open-door celebration, where extended family and friends traipse from home to home to deliver good wishes and gifts. It is a “parranda” similar to the caroling customs enjoyed in the U.S., except Hispanics are much louder. And there’s less singing – actually, no singing, just lots of joy and cheer. Delivered loudly. With a healthy dose of adult libations. The children are thrilled to receive the many gifts from each visiting family while the adults partake in stories of days’ past. Glorious!

Christmas, for most Latinos, is a quieter affair, the religious celebration of the birth of Jesus. It’s a day spent at church and then with family to celebrate this holy miracle. Los Reyes Magos, or Three Kings Day, Jan. 6, coincides with Epiphany, when the Three Kings find Mary, Joseph and Jesus in the manger and shower them with gift of frankincense, myrrh and gold. (It’s also known as the 12th day of Christmas.) Yet Los Reyes Magos is not a big deal in the U.S.; by Jan. 6, most Americans are back into their routines, already breaking their new year’s resolutions. But Latinos are still celebrating, potentially impacting staffing, scheduling and even long-term retention.

Observing Noche Buena and Los Reyes Magos, in light of the growing Hispanic population, creates an environment of inclusivity. This is more than just changing the holiday signage on your door. It’s about acknowledging the cultural differences that contribute to the greatness of this nation.

Although having a national holiday or day off from work in observance of Noche Buena or Los Reyes Mago would be awesome, it is not feasible. But seek input from your employees on ways to celebrate and acknowledge their culture, to ensure people feel included. (This practice applies to the masses, of course, not just Hispanics.)

As we all gather around the watercooler or our Facebook newsfeed during the holidays, ask about individual holiday traditions and initiate the dialogue to foster an environment where you and your team increase engagement and thereby productivity.

My best piece of advice to truly celebrate the season: Allow your folks enough time to get the end-of-year work done without excessive pressure and stress and, if possible, grant them extra time off to rest, recharge and celebrate. Incorporate the input from the team and see how well 2017 develops.

Amigos, Feliz Navidad and much prosperity and health in the new year!

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