

I Want To Talk A Little Bit About The WWE Gimmick Assembly Line

Back in 1908, the Ford Motor Company began manufacturing a car called the Model T. The idea behind it was simple: use the same format on an assembly line to mass produce affordable automobiles. It was a smash hit and became the standard method used for designing cars that is still used today. All of a sudden everyone had the same kind of car, but a lot more people could get their hands on one. The idea was that if you take away the uniqueness of cars, you could get them out faster, cheaper, and sell a lot more.

Now the problem with this method is just as I said: it takes away the uniqueness of the cars being released. Basically the Model T was one size fits all and everyone got basically the same thing. This brings us to the modern WWE and one of the many (among other) problems the company is facing at the moment: a large portion of the roster could be interchangeable with anyone else on the roster and it would make almost no difference. Let's take a look at a few examples.

Before I get into this: note that I am talking about characters only. Their in ring work isn't being considered a factor here.

Let's take a look at Randy Orton. Orton's character is that he snaps quickly and has anger issues. Here's where we get to the problem: practically anyone on the roster is perfectly capable of handling that part. Orton is someone that is going to be over no matter what he does because of his reputation and the RKO. However, his character has nothing unique about it and there's almost no depth to it.

As for someone who doesn't have a big finishing move to fall back on, let's look at say Heath Slater. Slater is a guy who came out week after week and got beaten up by various legends. He ran his mouth and talked about being a one man band, but there's nothing to him. Slater has won some matches and even a few titles, but at the end of the day he hasn't done anything of note in years and almost anyone could play his part. The titles that he won don't mean anything for the most part as so many people have won championships, but that's a discussion for another time.

I could go on and on with names like that, but there's a name in particular that explains things far better than anyone else I could talk about: Cody Rhodes. Cody has had an evolution to his character over the last few years. In June of 2010, Rhodes won a poll of the WWE Divas, naming him the best looking male wrestler in the company. This led to him becoming Dashing Cody Rhodes, a man obsessed with his looks and grooming.

Up to this point, almost anyone could have portrayed the character. However, all of that was groundwork for his next feud. After about six months of this gimmick, Rhodes faced Rey Mysterio where Mysterio's knee brace smashed into Rhodes' face. For the next few weeks, Rhodes refused to let his face be seen as he required facial reconstruction surgery to repair the damages.

After staying off of TV for about six weeks, Rhodes returned while wearing a mask. He claimed to be scarred under the mask, but due to it being clear, we could see that no scars were there and the damage was all in his mind. He basically turned into Dr. Doom from Marvel Comics, as he hid his face as much as he could due to the fear of what people would think of him. This is where things get important.

After spending months caring only about his looks, Rhodes was now ashamed of them due to the severe damage he had suffered. The six months beforehand had laid the groundwork for the character that he had become, and the new character only would have this kind of impact with Cody portraying it. In short, it was a unique character that we had watched evolve over the previous few months into the person that we saw before us. These things combined to make Cody a successful and interesting character, as opposed to just being the son of Dusty Rhodes.

Then it stopped. Rhodes still wore the mask but wasn't as insane as he had been before. Rhodes did little of note before winning the Intercontinental Title in August of 2011. A few months later, Rhodes began feuding with Randy Orton, eventually resulting in him losing his mask and having it broken.

Since then, Cody Rhodes has been Cody Rhodes. He's a guy in trunks that comes out, has the occasional match, and then goes to the back again. Nothing of note happens, his matches are about the same every week, and he only occasionally has a feud. At the moment, he's feuding with Sin Cara because he wants to take Cara's mask. Why does he want to do that? No apparent reason. No mention of Cody's time in a mask. No mention of anything unique at all.

Today, Rhodes is lucky to get on Smackdown for two straight weeks most of the time. He's lost most of the intriguing characteristics and traits that he had going for him before and is now little more than a cocky heel who says he's better than everyone else. That would be basically the same exact gimmick as Miz and Ziggler, as well as the same as guys like Del Rio and Mahal, although minus the ability to be able to say it in other languages. It's hardly a gimmick at all other than someone being cocky.

For a contrast, let's take a look at a few of the people who are freshly coming up on the roster. Instead of talking about various people and listing their personality traits, we'll focus on one: Damien Sandow. Yes he says that he's better than you, but he has a unique spin on it. Instead of just saying how great he is, Sandow says that he's smarter than you. He talks about how bad society is with the obsession with celebrities and pushes the idea of intellectualism.

If that doesn't work for you, let's take a look at David Otunga. Again just looking at his character, there is no one else on the roster that could play his character of a smug lawyer as well as he could. This is the case for one simple reason: Otunga IS a smug lawyer. He doesn't have to try to figure out what a Harvard educated lawyer would say because he just has to say what comes naturally to him. This is where you can solve a lot of the issues I'm mentioning here.

It makes little sense to take the gimmicks of people that aren't right for a part and trying to make them into that. The most successful wrestlers of all time are the ones who live the gimmick they have and see it as an extension of their own personalities. People like Undertaker, Savage, Flair, Austin and Rock all have been described as portraying themselves with more intensity than they would have in real life. It makes for a more believable performance and the characters are more successful.

If this doesn't make sense, think back to the Attitude Era. Just a quick look at the roster shows the following gimmicks: a redneck, a jock, an outcast who hangs out in boiler rooms and is craving acceptance while suffering from multiple personalities, a burn victim, a man who may or may not be dead, a pimp, a group of degenerates, a group of oddities, a group of vampires, a guy who looks like an Academy Award, a mixed martial artist, a superhero, an outdoorsman, a sex obsessed powerlifter and a security guard. For the most part, there is almost no overlap to any of

those things and they're all unique characters. You could say the same thing about a lot of people in the 80s as well.

In short, the problem that I see with a lot of the gimmicks in modern WWE is that there's nothing really specific about a lot of the characters. You could easily replace almost anyone with anyone else and you would have the same thing all over again. That doesn't make for interesting television and you have to rely on in ring talent to make up the difference. When you have almost everyone trained by the same training staff, you're not likely to see anyone break out in the ring with a different style that is going to set the world on fire. Mix it up and things will improve a lot.