

I Want To Talk A Little Bit About Character Development

This is one of those things that came to me when I was in the shower, which for some reason is where most of these ideas come from. Character development is one of the major things that is lacking in today's product. I was reading a Jim Cornette commentary the other day and he said something to the effect of it's not about what your character would say, but rather that the people you see ARE their characters. For instance, Ric Flair wasn't playing the Nature Boy Ric Flair. He WAS the Nature Boy Ric Flair. That was then.

Today, most people on a wrestling show don't have characters. Take for example Heath Slater. What do we know about him? Well he likes southern rock and he was on NXT and he was in the Nexus. What else do we know about him? For the most part, nothing at all. There's nothing else that we have to go on about him. Oh and he's not nice. Why should I care about this person? In short, there's nothing there. He isn't developed in the slightest. What exactly is a One Man Southern Rock Band? Does he play the bass with his toes?

Let's compare Slater to someone who is currently the talk of the WWE world: The Funkasaurus himself, Brodus Clay. What do we know about this incarnation of Brodus Clay? He's big, he's a monster, he's presumably a good guy, he loves to dance, he likes to have fun, he talks in the ring, and he has a thing for funk music. We got all that from him in a five minute segment. Heath Slater debuted on WWE TV on February 23, 2010. He's been around almost two years and we learned more about Clay in five minutes.

Slater is one of the vast majority of the roster that has the same problem. It's a long standing problem that has been getting worse and worse every year. Anymore, we never hear

anything from these people other than whatever factoids Cole is willing to throw out to us this week, when he has time to stop arguing that is. Clay is a rare occurrence but the problem at the end of the day is that no one ever gets the chance to tell us anything. Let's take a closer look at this.

Look at some of the big stars in WWE: Cena, Orton, Sheamus, Punk, Rhodes, Ziggler etc. Off the top of your head, you could probably tell me a good bit about any of their characters without saying a single thing about any of their matches. Sheamus for instance: he's Irish, he loves to fight, stands up to bullies, he has a rather interesting family, and he likes to pretend to be angry before smiling. Oh and he's related to Beaker from the Muppets. In short, he's someone that we know a few things about and we could determine if he's someone we want to support.

You could do that for most of the top names on the roster. What do those names have in common? They're all developed characters of course. Now for the important question: how did they get that way. The answer is simple: they've been allowed to talk and explain their characters through their actions. Now, the majority of the roster doesn't get this luxury because we're just told what happens to them. Even the main guys have limited characters. Let's go back to everyone's favorite era: the Attitude Era.

Consider one bald headed rattlesnake. When Austin arrived, he was the Ringmaster. What the heck is a ringmaster? He had a feud with Savio Vega over...something. Then he was turned into Stone Cold, which still didn't really mean much. Then he started talking about how much he didn't like authority. Then he had a match at King of the Ring 1996 with Jake Roberts, and he cut a promo after it. He talked about being the new generation and at the end of it, he tied it together by talking about a Bible verse, connecting to Jake's preacher character. A superstar was born.

Now I'm not saying that everyone who gets to talk for 90 seconds is going to be Steve Austin. However, what it does do is give them a chance to let us know a little more about them. What are they like? What should we know about them? What's their take on things? We don't know that about most wrestlers today. There's a simple solution to this problem: have them tell us. Instead of Cole telling us that Justin Gabriel is the South African Werewolf (whatever that is) or what the significance of Hunico's bicycle's bike is or where Kofi went to college. Let us tell us these things, or better yet SHOW US these things.

Going back to Austin, imagine this. Now Austin can best be summed up as a rebel right? He rebelled against tradition, authority, pretty much everything. Now imagine if when he came down the ramp, Vince called him a rebel and he wore a Confederate flag and Vince kept pounding it into our heads that Austin was a rebel. How long do you think his character would have lasted? He'd have been lucky to make it out of 1996. Vince and JR treated him like someone who had done something rather than slapping a label on him and inserting that word into their commentary like a Mad Lib. Characters need to be acted out, not named.

How do we go about doing this you ask? There are a few ways to accomplish this, so let's take a look at them.

1. Inset promos. These are one of the greatest ideas ever in wrestling. They were a lot more popular in the old days, but they seem to be making a small comeback. When someone is coming to the ring, have a small box pop up with them in it talking. They can talk about their current feud, an upcoming match, or something about their character. Have them out doing something or whatever. They're short, they're easy, and they can tell us a lot about someone.

2. Cut a few other things on the show to say time. There are so many things that happen on an episode of Raw that could be

shaved off to give us more time. First of all, you could cut the Divas matches. Think about it: what do these matches add? The Divas don't have storylines, most of them are interchangeable, the matches last at most two minutes, and they don't go anywhere most of the time. When did Beth last defend the title anyway? Or cut the Did You Knows. 3 of them per show, 15 seconds each, you could cut a nice little promo in 45 seconds. See how easy it can be?

Another thing that could work wonders for the character development: let these guys develop their own characters. Think about it. Have you ever seen someone with the completely wrong character for them? Think of the Undertaker for instance. Can you imagine him as say...Doink? It would be the totally wrong fit for him. Giving someone the right character is essential.

Look at the Rock. His character basically was a jock that cracked jokes. In real life, Rock was in fact, a jock who probably cracked a lot of jokes. Austin really is a redneck from Texas. Vince McMahon really is a somewhat crazy, self-obsessed rich guy that owns the WWE. Their characters worked really well because they knew how to be themselves and it was something they could get behind because they didn't have to act.

Let's look at an example of this not working: Lance Storm as a fun loving dancer. Lance Storm is a very talented wrestler. He's fun to watch, he's smooth, he's very smart (read his stuff), and he couldn't have looked more out of place as a guy who loved dancing and having fun. Now, maybe that's how he is in real life, I don't know. The character was totally out of place and I think everyone knew it.

Shifting gears a little bit, let's look at wrestlers' ring names. This is where a lot of the appeal is being lost I think. Today, here are some wrestlers' ring names: John Cena, Randy Orton, Darren Young, Heath Slater, Justin Gabriel, Evan

Bourne, Wade Barrett. What do any of those names invoke images of in your heads? They're just names. None of them are exciting or interesting or make me want to go and see who they are.

Let's look at some of the old generation's names.

Hulk Hogan: someone big, strong, the Incredible Hulk.

Ultimate Warrior: speaks for itself.

Randy Savage: crazy, wild, violent.

See how easy it is? These people are supposed to be wrestlers and larger than life characters, but for some reason Vince has decided he'd rather they sound like accountants. The appeal of the name is something that can make you pause and want to hear more about them. Why is this such a horrible thing to do anymore? For some reason the WWE seems to think that the best thing to do is make everyone as generic as possible, probably in case they jump or whatever, but still it gets annoying. If you can make up a name, make it something decent.

Finally we have entrance music. Often times the theme song of someone can tell you all you need to know about them in just a few seconds. Think of Ted DiBiase's song: money, everyone has a price, I get what I want. Hogan: he loves America, he'll fight for everyone, he'll never quit. Shawn: I know I'm awesome, I know I'm good looking, I know I'm the best. How many people today have a song that could ONLY go with their character? The answer is very few.

Character development is lacking so much in the modern wrestling product anymore today. Even the slightest bit of it seems to be stamped out almost as quickly as it came. Look at Del Rio: there is NOTHING we know about his character that we didn't know a year ago. He had the wink and it was implied that he was a very evil person, but then they took care of that and made him a guy that was rich and talked about

destiny. Well what then? Once he reaches his destiny, what can come from him then? It's like the company has decided they want everyone as generic as possible and it's really hurting things. Why would I want to see people who are as uninteresting as possible? If you can figure that out you're a lot smarter than I am.

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