

In an effort to gently create an understanding, this document was circulated amongst every corporate executive overseeing the Muppets throughout my tenure since 2004. It will live on this site as a reference document.

EXCERPTS FROM “COMPONENTS OF THE MUPPETS” Thoughts from Steve Whitmire

The subject of this dissertation is a guideline pertaining to the Muppets, and why understanding this basic, essential tenet is imperative. Rather than just scanning it, please read it thoughtfully at your leisure. This was not written as a response to any particular issue or event, but as an overall observation. It concerns a well established precept that has consistently been in place ever since the very first Muppet character was conceived. There are no exceptions to this rule. It is as follows:

Each and every Muppet character consists of at least two differentiated and equal components: a puppet, and a performer.

Friends, it just doesn't get any more basic than that. However, in its simplicity the depth of this crucial idea is often overlooked. None of the Muppets can exist without both of its equal halves, both of those fundamental elements. Why not?

- *Because the Muppets are **real**. They occur as fact, are actual rather than imaginary or fictitious. Unlike animated characters and most fantasy characters their particular physicality allows them to exist in the real world in **exactly the same form as they appear on screen** without the need for alternate versions of any kind. They can show up anywhere at anytime in much the same way that any celebrity can - in their original form. **They are physical, not illusory - original, rather than imitation.***
- *The Muppets can look you in the eye and have a first person conversation about anything. They are never at a loss for words because they respond consistently with the same tangible subjective mentality as any living, breathing individual you might encounter. **They are coherent.***
- *The Muppets have a point of view, an opinion. They discuss current events, politics, news items and each other's good and bad habits in character, both seriously and with humor. They operate from a firm foundation, a place of solid perspective and truth. **They fully and lucidly exist both in and out of their on-screen personas.***
- *The Muppets have consistent recollection and memory of events. Any one of them can talk to you about something you did together yesterday, last year, or thirty years ago. **They have consciousness.***
- *The Muppets are real individuals. They relate to each other and to the world from their individual perspectives, and individuals can not be duplicated and doubled. There is no level of our work at which this would become acceptable. There is no project so small or insignificant that the Muppets would not show up fully, originally intact. **They are genuine, not counterfeit.***

- *The Muppets are motivated by real feelings, memories, thoughts and emotions. The fact that physically they are puppets does not figure into who they are, and, as outlined above, Who They Are is what The Muppets have always been about, first and foremost. They have always existed as much more than a brand. That explains their ongoing connection to the audience, and though it has never disappeared, that is the 'magic' we seek to reinvigorate.*
- *Beyond their real world physical existence, none of the above attributes generates from the puppet component.*

Because it absolutely has to be understood, it bears repeating: ***Who They Are is what The Muppets have always been about.*** All of the above facts require the application of the rule that "each and every Muppet character consists of both a puppet, and a performer." Without recognition of, and operation from, the simple and obvious rule defining the two components (the exterior and the interior of each Muppet character), the Muppets are no longer the Muppets, pure and simple. Any alternate methodology redefines the half century old wheel.

So what constitutes the "Who" in Who They Are? That would be the second half of the equation, the "performer" component. And, though there are some similarities, as the "Who" of who the Muppets are, the Muppet Performers are quite different than typical actors and talent hired for projects at any level.

- *Unlike an actor who portrays a certain role on a temporary, limited basis such as in a series or motion picture, individual Muppet Performers have always been permanently cast as individual characters virtually for life.*
- *This permanent singular casting is what allows the Muppets to consistently grow and adapt, develop and evolve over time just as any individual human being would, a vital factor in a changing world.*
- *Since, as puppeteers, the performers supply both the voice and the movements for the life of characters who live in real time and in the physical world, they are supplying the personalities unique to each Muppet, the "soul", so to speak. That means that the ultimate responsibility for who a long term character is and who they will become, or 'character development', has always been in the hands of the performer - it must be for the character to grow cohesively and organically.*

Compare this to a voice artist whose technique and portrayal for an animated character is limited to a vocal performance for a particular project.

Compare this to an actor who portrays a character in a motion picture (or series of them) whose role it is to bring a character to life only for a limited engagement, rather than as a lifetime commitment.

- *Puppeteers are traditionally responsible for far more than typical actors, often acting as performer; casting director; puppet builder; writer; producer; director; musician, set designer/builder, publicist, etc., as opposed to an actor whose job it may be to only portray a role.*

*As was the case with **Jim Henson who was a puppeteer long before he was a successful director, producer or businessman**, puppeteers often know what is required inside and out.*

The point? Evolution requires a solid foundation. The Muppets cannot successfully be treated solely in the same manner as other corporate brands if the goal is for them to thrive and grow. They are unique, and an open-minded understanding of certain established qualities and methods will make them worth the effort, and will allow them future success. None is more important than always remembering that there are people under there, and that those people, as half of the equation, offer you ultimate insight into the product you seek to market by giving you direct and exclusive access to the Muppets, themselves.