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## **The Wolf Of Wittenberg**

When someone considers the short term view instead of the long term view when making a life decision, they are partaking in a Faustian Bargain. In a Faustian Bargain, the decision made always brings the victim great worldly matters like wealth and power, however, in the end it always causes the victim's downfall, one way or another. The name originates from Christopher Marlowe's play, *Doctor Faustus*, in which the main character, Doctor Faustus, sells his soul to Lucifer, signing the contract in blood, in order to unlock an entirely new level of necromantic power. To break it would mean his life. After experiencing so much of this immense power, Faustus becomes disillusioned and lonely. He decides to repent, but this contract violation leads to his merciless death by the contractor himself, Lucifer (Marlowe 5.2.140-197). Much like in the story of *Doctor Faustus*, the power hungry employees of the cultish New York investment firm Stratton Oakmont took a strikingly similar arc with a few resembling characters. The employees of Stratton Oakmont committed a Faustian Bargain when they mercilessly scammed hundreds of companies and innocent investors out of millions of dollars to obtain immediate luxurious rewards.

Stratton Oakmont was the mecca of sleazy, ruthless, scum bags who thought of nothing other than how many hookers and drugs they could afford after their next sale. The firm's founder and CEO, Jordan Belfort, had a God-given talent of persuading anyone to do anything. Belfort left his former job in the seafood sales industry after finding a loophole in the penny stock trading market, and took his talents to Wall Street. Equipped with only a rag-tag team of amateur stock brokers, Belfort started the firm in a friend's car dealership (Solomon). Soon enough, Stratton Oakmont exploded into a remarkably profitable firm that "sold investors the moon but delivered sawdust" (Shapiro). To his near 1,000 employees, Belfort was seen as a divine entity. As described by ex-employee Josh Shapiro, "Belfort was behind the scenes, but a god, because it was all his idea. He was revered like nothing else" (Shapiro). He was taking social rejects, divorcees, and the unemployed and turning them into irresistible millionaires. Belfort perfectly resembles the character Lucifer in the story of Doctor Faustus.

Jordan Belfort's partner Danny Porush was his trusty outsourcer. He was actually the one convincing the potential brokers to come work for the firm. Porush created an eccentric and nearly irresistible atmosphere in the "boiler-room" (Reiff). Josh Shapiro recalls the first time he walked into the room, "...you could feel the pulse when you walked into the place... The energy was unbounding and unstoppable, and you wanted to be a part of it from Day 1" (Shapiro). Having such high intensity and optimism, Porush could reel in any one victim to work for Stratton Oakmont by saying just a few lines. Porush would say, "Please, sit down. Do you want to make a million dollars a year? Do you want to make \$100,000 a month? This is how you do it" (Shapiro). Someone so suave and persuasive that gathers minions for its master sounds exactly like Mephistopheles from Marlowe's play. And, of course, all the power-hungry, sex-crazed, drug-addicted minion stock brokers resemble Doctor Faustus.

The people whose lives were once meaningless were given a purpose and an opportunity, an opportunity that was almost too good to be true: to make millions by saying a few words. Belfort and Porush convinced these desperate rejects to follow them and spread the two wolves' empire, and, in return, get all the money, sex, and drugs that a brainwashed man could ask for (Brown). One 28-year-old employee was said to have come from installing carpets for a living to earning gross commissions of \$800,000 his first year at Stratton Oakmont (Solomon). A broker working as hard as this guy was always rewarded, not just in cash. When Belfort noticed an employee having a successful quarter, he would recognize their progress by spotting them an hour with a "Gina girl," the cr me de la cr me of prostitutes (Shapiro). Nothing entices a bum off the streets more than being given an item out of their league, whether it be a girl, drugs, or money, for doing easy work. These minions were so overwhelmed with wealth they had no idea what to do with it, but not a single one of them planned to hold onto it. All they cared about was what they could do with their riches right then. Josh Shapiro illustrates, "...I didn't save any money – I spent it as fast as it came. I never bought any property – I didn't think it was ever going to end. Property? The future? No. The future was right here and now" (Shapiro). At Stratton Oakmont, employees could get whatever and do whatever

they wanted; just like Doctor Faustus. Thanks to Mephistopheles and Lucifer, Faustus literally had the power to do anything he desired. The world was their oyster.

In its prime, Stratton Oakmont was reported to have had around 1,000 employees on payroll accountable for roughly \$1 billion in investments (Reiff). The firm was on top of the world, and had uncapped potential to grow. However, the National Association of Securities Dealers (NASD) had been onto them since the beginning. Belfort, Porush, and the rest of the firm knew the day would come when the government would accumulate enough evidence to prosecute. In 1996, the firm was shut down and the once unstoppable and invincible brokers of Stratton Oakmont, at the end of their Faustian arc, were forced to pay millions in reparations and were put back on the streets. This downfall is, once again, just like Faustus. In the short run, his decision brought him everything he could ask for and more. While in the long run, it only brought him what he least desired.

In conclusion, Christopher Marlowe portrays Doctor Faustus as an extraordinarily intelligent individual who thinks so highly of his intellect that he convinces himself he is too good for ordinary occupations of this earth. Therefore, he decides to explore extraterrestrial knowledge: necromancy. This decision brings him immense power and knowledge, enough to "...make all nations canonize..." him with the help of Lucifer and Mephistopheles (Marlowe 1.1.113-114). In doing so, he overlooks the long term affects and it destroys him in the end. Similarly, the Stratton Oakmont business model of "pushing dicey stocks on gullible investors" brought the brokers ridiculous loads of wealth and luxury with the guidance of Jordan Belfort and Danny Porush, however, the technique is otherwise known as "the pump-and-dump scheme," which is otherwise known as fraud (Solomon). In the short term view, illegally trading in penny stocks provided Stratton Oakmont brokers with all the money, drugs, and sex a man could ask for. In the long run, it cost them prison time, millions of dollars in reparations, or even a life of addiction. Stratton Oakmont and its "merry band of brokers" underwent a Faustian Bargain when they ripped off hundreds of people for millions of dollars to obtain immediate opulence (Solomon).