



NUQUL GROUP

SINCE 1952

Growing Together

Ideas worth spreading





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Ghassan Nuqul's tenacious commitment to a sound corporate governance structure, coupled with an unwavering adherence to ethical business values and an ambitious strategic vision has not been an easy feat by any standards. The success of the Nuqul Group's CSR policies, risk management plans, business transparency and equal opportunities has culminated in this honorary accolade to join an exclusive group of nearly 20 noteworthy family business leaders from around the world.

Congratulations on winning this prestigious award. How do you feel about this recognition?

This award is a valuable recognition. Even though the journey has been ripe with challenges, I have always been steadfast and determined to cross that milestone in our lives.

When I started out, I came up with a mission statement for myself: to make a difference in my family, my business and my country. I truly wanted to make a difference.

I have been very keen from the outset to institutionalize our business for the obvious reasons. I think for a family business - or any business - to grow, you need an institutional framework that embodies many elements including investment in human energy and empowerment with all that it entails.

To transform a business that had been in existence for 45 years at the time into an institution with governance was not an easy endeavour, given that my father and I were spearheading major expansion plans outside and inside Jordan. And don't forget that one cannot work on family business governance without governance for the family itself. It was challenging because we had to address difficult issues and make hard choices.

You are going to the second EY Family Business Summit, scheduled to take place as part of the World Entrepreneur of the Year event this month in Monte Carlo. Many of the world's most notable family business owners will be attending. What do you hope to take with you to this meeting?

I am looking forward to Monte Carlo for

many reasons. I value the opportunity to share with and learn from others because the dynamics are constantly changing. Every phase has its challenges. That is why this networking and exchange is so valuable. I am very much looking forward to sharing my experiences, to represent Jordan with pride, but also to learn from others definitely.

It is not *what* you do but rather *how* you do it. This is part of the governance environment: systems and procedures, consistency, sustainability and labour rights.

We were the first members in Jordan of the Global Compact with the United Nations on embracing universal principles and



Elia Nuqul

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You have always said that the secret to your success has been the governance direction your business has undertaken. What does it entail?

You have to keep in mind that governance is a dynamic direction. It doesn't stop. It entails many issues, from how to conduct a business to how to govern yourself and all the elements of a business, including equal opportunity, empowerment, remuneration, the environment, ethics and code of conduct and transparency. Personally, I don't believe in secrets. Publicly traded companies list their annual reports and tell you everything.

engaging effectively with other enlightened global businesses on labor rights and conditions, among many other principles.

It's a comprehensive approach towards running your business. And it makes business sense. This is key. Anyone can do it. There is no one size that fits all. You can always adjust according to your conditions. For example, our Group Standard Manual (GSM) is on our portal and governs our operations. There is no room for guessing or experimenting. However, it is also dynamic and adjusted on a weekly basis. We have in fact just



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added my favourite chapter: how to break a system. We encourage our leaders to be daring if they feel the system is not in the best interest of our customer. There is a committee to evaluate if such adjustments are in line with our culture and code of conduct. If they are, they are incorporated into our systems and become policy.

So again, governance is a culture, a way of doing business right, both internally and externally including the environment, society, CSR, community, laws, taxes, you name it.

My father taught me that success is like an electric circuit. You can never have a current if the circuit is not closed. To do so, all the elements must be in place and active.



“ Let there be no illusions about this though: I am very fortunate. My father has given me the platform and the name. That's why I feel I need to make a difference.”

We claim back much of our fibre. We are also reducing our CO2 emissions and producing cleaner energy.

So again, it not only makes business sense, it makes environmental sense. And this takes me back to the circuit of success. It has to be part and parcel of your overall methodology. It also goes a long way with your credibility and goodwill, with your customers and your employees. When they see you abiding by a code of conduct that governs your commitment to the environment and equal opportunity, they cannot but respect you and follow in your footsteps. You also become the employer of choice. And that was one of our main business objectives, to attract the best calibre in the region.



Speaking of the environment, Nuqul Group is known for its commitment to responsible behavior towards the environment. Your motto is “Growing Together.” Can you tell me more about that?

We are committed to our responsibility to use natural resources in a safer, sustainable manner and have implemented environmentally-friendly technologies at our plants and mills.

All our pulp suppliers, for instance, have to abide by the sustainable forestry

doctrine of the Forest Stewardship Council that mandates every time a tree is cut, it be replaced by a minimum number of three.

Ethical governance is a business necessity. And to be honest, if you are environmentally conscious, it makes business sense in the long run. We managed to greatly reduce our mills' water intake. We recycle our industrial wastewater back into the manufacturing process. Our plants' water is treated and used for irrigation.

How do you spot talent and how do you retain it?

We use headhunters. And we attract talent because of our business ethics. Empowerment is key. An MIT study on what entices top-calibre, high level talent found that the ability to make a difference ranked highest. And how can employees make a difference if the employer doesn't provide the space? So empowerment and creating the space are key drivers, as long as you draw the framework, in terms of your code of conduct and culture. We offer profit sharing, bonuses and international salary scales.

But it hasn't been easy. We grew from a



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small family business dependent on one person (my father) putting in 16 hours a day with five companies in 1985, to 26 companies in 1996 run by a two-man show. We became a bottleneck. This is when I decided that we could not sustain the growth and do all the restructuring and systemization we aimed for.

Did you find you had to struggle with the mentality of the older generation to be able to implement changes and offer new perspectives?
You bet. There is something called the habit. My father was very progressive. He believed in me. He believed in my mission even though it was contrary to what he was used to. He certainly took chances because I made bold changes. Thankfully, we both got to see the results. Even though our styles are different, we share the same values and vision. That's the secret.

Let there be no illusions about this though: I am very fortunate. My father has given me the platform and the name. That's why I feel I need to make a difference. And I am proud and honored to have continued his journey along the same course of values and culture – but with new blood and a new dynamic way employing the best available technology.

Did you ever have moments of self-doubt?
The first day on the job was a very special day for me because I had a closed discussion with my father for three hours. One of the things he told me I carry with me every day: business in our part of the world is like a stone cutter hammering away at his rock, perhaps a thousand times before there's even a crack in it.

It has been tough, particularly in the last four years or so. But you know what, I get a kick out of it! Eighty percent of my time is spent addressing serious problems. But I cannot wait to go to work every morning. I am definitely blessed. It's all in the mindset. In return, you enjoy the achievement.

The journey is more important than profit for me. My mission is to make a difference, and learn and network along the way.

And I always rely on the "pillow test," when I rest my head on my pillow at night

and my conscience is clear. This is both the reward and the drive for me.

This company is no longer for the Nuqul family. It is for all our stakeholders: employees, suppliers, customers, banks, etc.

Tell me more about your involvement in giving back to the community, the group's CSR activities and the Ela Nuqul Foundation?
Going back to the electric circuit of success: CSR is part and parcel, in the heart of good governance. It has to come from a place of true conviction that you owe it to your community. Successful CSR is when you employ good business practices into social entrepreneurship. We are the first company in Jordan to sign a partnership agreement with the government in Al Koura district. We committed ourselves to a proactive approach to social development and chose

Al Koura district, where we also partnered with established NGOs to assess needs. Today, we use the civic center to run our five interventions in the area: a legal clinic, robotics center, micro-fund, chemical-free farming and productive kitchen, and packaging and printing center.

What would you tell young talent entering the job market now?
I want to start with a *hadith* by the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH): "Allah loves that if one does a job, he perfects it." Why is it that we excel at what we do when we work abroad only? So for starters, we need to aim to perfect what we do *all* the time. My father always said continuous hits are bound to eventually get a result. He fell often, but he would rise stronger after every fall. I would say work hard, believe in yourself, make mistakes and learn. I make mistakes every day. 📌

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