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Ghassan Nuqul

Nuqul Group

The Nuqul Group combines extraordinary entrepreneurship and exceptional corporate governance. Now run by the second generation under the leadership of Ghassan Nuqul, the Jordan-based business has expanded into markets across the Middle East and beyond. That's testament to its founder Elia Nuqul, his children and the many loyal employees of this Middle Eastern business success story.



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Ghassan Nuqul,
Vice Chairman,
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Ghassan Nuqul, Vice Chairman of the Nuqul Group, remembers his early days working for the Jordanian family business that his father set up in 1952. "I started in the factory at 6:45 then, in the afternoon, worked in the office and normally finished late," he says. "I also worked most weekends."

Passion and hard work

Ghassan says the regime of hard work that his father Elia Nuqul put him through was tough, but worth every minute in terms of lessons learnt and contacts made. "That's how you build a successful business – passion and hard work," Ghassan says. And there's little doubt that the outcome of this passion and effort has been worthwhile, because Ghassan and his brother, together with Elia, have created one of Jordan's biggest privately owned businesses. Today, the Nuqul Group comprises 31 companies, employs more than 5,100 people and exports its products across the Middle East and beyond.

Nuqul's core business, which is managed by FINE Hygienic Holding, is paper and hygienic products. It is the biggest maker of facial and toilet tissue paper in the Middle

East, but also makes kitchen towels, table napkins, diapers, incontinence products and coasters. Another holding company manages a diverse group of investments, which includes holdings in banks, insurance companies, car dealerships, real estate and others. Nuqul has operations in more than 10 countries, including the US, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Ghassan is proud of the achievements of Nuqul. But ask him about the big decisions he has made in his life, and his answer concerns corporate governance. "The most important decision I've made in my career is to separate ownership and management. And the second one is to ensure that Nuqul adheres to the highest levels of governance one can possibly have as a family business."

A family constitution rules succession

The business is 100% owned by the family, and the decision to separate management from ownership was taken in 2004. "It is always a challenge to separate management from ownership, separate business finances from family finances and clarify duties, responsibilities and authorities of family members, in addition to defining a clear strategy for future investments and



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The first machines used in 1976 (left) and one of the first stores (middle); Elia Nuqul with King Abdullah (right picture).

the role of family members," says Ghassan. "But, if you don't do it, you risk the family business being eliminated."

A family constitution, drafted in 2004, is at the core of the family aspect of the division. It defines how the family relates to the business, lays down rules for succession and sets out how the next generations are allowed to interact with the company. "No family member can join Nuqul without working for at least two years outside beforehand," says Ghassan. "They must also have an appropriate level of education." Further progress on governance came in 2008, when Nuqul became one of the first Jordanian companies to become a signatory to the United Nations' Global Compact Initiative, the world's biggest voluntary corporate responsibility movement.

Advising other family businesses

Ghassan often finds himself advising family businesses across the region about institutionalizing – whether that's setting up a family constitution or bringing in non-family senior managers.

But it's not just Ghassan's corporate governance expertise that is sought after across the Middle East. Elia's experience of setting up Nuqul is now taught at Harvard Business School as a case study of how to establish a business in the Middle East. It's hardly surprising, because Elia's story is special. Nuqul has got to where it is today against a backdrop of internecine regional wars, economic hardship and political instability.



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Ghassan with his brother Marwan and his father Elia.

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Born in the Palestinian city of Ramallah, Elia started a wholesale business called Nuqul Brothers in Amman. The business focused first on importing goods from Europe. A few years later, Elia and other family members became involved in hygienic paper products. In 1962, the business expanded into sanitary towels and, in 1966, witnessed the beginning of expanding production of various hygienic paper products. With the capture of the West Bank by Israel in 1967, Nuqul’s markets were severely affected. But Elia wasn’t going to let geopolitical events stop the growth of the business. So he began Nuqul’s drive to develop markets outside of Jordan. Nevertheless, further political instability, this time in Jordan, forced the business to relocate in 1970 for one year to Lebanon.

Great philanthropic efforts

After gaining degrees in the US, including an MBA, Ghassan joined the business in 1985. His two sisters – Lina and Randa – briefly worked at Nuqul, and today, his brother Marwan sits on the group’s board. Elia remains Chairman of the Board. But he is now in his 80s. Ghassan says that Elia has passed the running of the business over to the next generation and the professional managers. Salim Karadsheh, the Chief Executive of FINE Hygienic Holdings, has been a long-time employee of the group. He is very much the trusted non-family boss, and he exemplifies the corporate structures put in place in 2004, says Ghassan.

The family’s philanthropic efforts were formalized in 2008 when the Elia Nuqul Foundation was set up. The foundation concentrates on social and economic initiatives in Jordan, and promotes education by giving out a number of academic scholarships every year and equipping its scholars with technical as well as employability skills. It is also involved in a number of social entrepreneurial initiatives.

Ghassan says that future generations of Nuquls are expected to be involved in philanthropic efforts. “Nuqul thinks about all its stakeholders,” he says. “And a big stakeholder is the wider community.”



The headquarters of the Nuqul Group in Amman, Jordan.

Future Nuqul family members will take inspiration from two generations of exceptional leaders, who demonstrated a commitment to strong corporate governance and an equally strong community.

Ghassan Nuqul	
Vice Chairman	
Company:	Nuqul Group
Generation(s):	1st and 2nd
Founded:	1952 in Amman, Jordan
Industries:	Conglomerate and various industries
Employees (2014):	Approx. 5,100