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## Jose Maria Ventura

Laboratorios Ordesa

Founded in 1943 in the town of Tamarite de Litera, Laboratorios Ordesa has grown to be a major player in infant nutrition in Spain, where its Blemil and Blevit brands are household names. The group's president is 2nd generation family member Jose Maria Ventura. During his 40 years at the helm, Jose Maria has overseen a huge expansion of the business into new markets such as Saudi Arabia, and many South American countries, among others. Today, half of the business's production is shipped overseas.



**“The family’s experience of the company is very immediate. Triumphs as well as failures really hit home.”**

**Jose Maria Ventura,**  
President,  
Laboratorios Ordesa

As they mature and move through the generations, many family businesses struggle to define exactly what role the family members should take. Increasingly, in a world where business is complex, multinational and fast moving, they turn to professional managers to run the firm. So what is left for the owners? Any family struggling with this idea could do worse than look to the example of Laboratorios Ordesa.

the future, etc., but not specifically at the executive level of the company, which we think should be in the hands of professionals." It is agreed among the family, he says, that once he leaves the business, the family will no longer be involved at all in its day-to-day running, but form part of the Board of Directors, "leaving the professionals to their work, doing what they know how to do."



Production of infant nutrition at Ordesa some decades ago.



"The success of the company is unquestionably that of all its employees."

### Leaving the professionals to their work

Explaining how the group is run, its President Jose Maria Ventura is admirably realistic about the need for professional managers: "One can own an airline, love it very much, value it, know the routes that one wants to fly. But obviously, the owner will not be flying the airplane and, if he or she did, I would not get on board that plane."

Ventura goes on: "We promote a significant involvement of the family in the planning, strategic plan, guiding ideas for

This doesn't mean that the family is passive. As with so many family businesses, the owners' connections are priceless. "The relationships that we have maintained with all of our clients and all of our suppliers have been key in our specific sector," says Ventura. "In addition, the fact that people knew me personally – and I don't mean to boast – has been an important factor in the company's growth. They have been able to deal face to face with the owner or majority shareholder of the company."

In Laboratorios Ordesa's sector, this is very rare, because most firms are corporations. "In our case, they have been able to have

this relationship with me, and my family, because my children have also participated in numerous conferences, exhibitions and so on." That is not the only advantage of being family owned. "Decision-making can be much faster and much more effective than in a conventional company, given how close the company's shareholders are. And that is a competitive and, frankly, significant advantage," he says.

### Family businesses have a long-term focus

Although he knows that the family will relinquish its management role, Ventura is 100% committed to continued family ownership and involvement, and is clear that all family members have to be committed. "The next generation has to understand that, in a family business, it is very important that everyone participates and shares the family's values. Because if someone fails to do so, it would be a burden on the company," he says.

That makes it vital to "transmit to the next generation the value of being a part of this family business, a sense of pride in belonging to it, and the ability to see both its successes and failures as one's own." As non-managing owners, the next generation will have a different role to his. But, he says "we have tried to instill in the next generation the values and the feeling that need to be maintained, not only in the workplace, but in taking on a shareholder role, without losing the feeling of being part of the company. They need to experience it as closely as those who do the day-to-day work." He calls this the company's most important challenge.

This is difficult because family businesses have a long-term focus, and "the immediate results are not as important as consolidating and maintaining the company for several generations." However, being a family business, says Ventura, is an emotional thing. "The family's experience of the company is very immediate. Triumphs as well as failures really hit home," he says. Family members feel short-term events deeply, but have to learn to step back and see the big picture.



Products of Laboratorios Ordesa are sold in Europe, the Middle East, Latin America and North Africa.



Laboratorios Ordesa was founded in 1943 in Tamarite de Litera.



Half of the business's production is shipped overseas.



Opening of a plant in attendance of King Felipe VI.

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Jose Maria Ventura

The family does not have a motto or a set of principles that defines its mission. But, says Ventura, it is united by pride in the work of the Fundación Ordesa. In the last years the winning projects of the 12 Ordesa Calls for Applications for Aid, has been donated more than €3m allocated to a total of 65 projects which have directly benefited more than 200,000 children and they has also donated over 200,000 tonnes of baby milk and food to people who could not afford it in numerous countries, and helped write pamphlets about infant nutrition for non Spanish-speaking immigrants in its home country. “The foundation is directly managed by the family and funded by the company’s profits,” Ventura explains. “It is a unifying element. The ability to take action through the foundation is something that fills all of us with pride, and strengthens our commitment to the company.”

#### Family members have Board positions

The company has a family board, and there is no official family protocol, “although it has been discussed several times and we have given it a try,” Ventura says. At the moment, the family board makes the most important decisions for all of the companies within the Group, and this works. There is no succession plan either, because family members will no longer hold executive positions. But he suggests that there could be one for family board positions.

Ventura is clearly a huge advocate of the family business model. So can other businesses learn from family-owned ones? To an extent. Their long-termism means that “our reaction, and that of the majority of family companies that I know, is to expand investments rather than decrease them in order to obtain better results,” says Ventura. “The family company sacrifices results to maintain a greater market share, which requires investment. I believe that this is an important example that differentiates us from other types of companies.”

Another difference is that “the success of the company is unquestionably that of all its employees,” says Ventura. He adds

that it is important to have employees who are “committed to the project,” “When the time comes to face a challenge, we do so without delay or conflict, working as one toward an end goal shared by all.” If this is the case, then “the success of the company is a shared success.” If Laboratorios Ordesa ever looks for a motto, that would do nicely.

### Jose Maria Ventura

President

Company name:	<b>Laboratorios Ordesa</b>
Generation(s):	<b>2nd and 3rd</b>
Founded:	<b>1943 in Tamarite de Litera, Spain</b>
Industries:	<b>Infant nutrition</b>