The long and winding journey of a family business

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In a Tulane Family Business Forum presentation, Gyl Grinberg told the story of Val-Fit, the family-owned business he ran until the family's decision to wind the company down in 2016.

Gyl Grinberg (BSM ’95), former president of Val-Fit Inc., a leading master distributor of pipe, valves and fittings for the oil and gas industry, shared the family-owned company’s long and winding journey in a special presentation at November’s Tulane Family Business Forum.

Grinberg's father, Ismael "The Chief" Grinberg, founded his first company, Tuvansa, in Mexico in 1956. Today, the company remains Mexico’s largest PVF distributor. While recovering from open-heart surgery in Los Angeles in 1979, Grinberg founded the U.S.-based Val-Fit, eventually growing the company into a regional master distributor with locations in California, Texas and Georgia. Following Ismael Grinberg's death in 2016, Gyl and his family made the difficult decision to sell Val-

Fit’s assets to Houston-based Dodson Global and focus their full attention on Tuvansa.

For his Family Business Forum presentation, Grinberg shared his experience growing up in the family business, including taking on a leadership roles, navigating his and his brother's conflicting management styles, dealing with a tragic workplace encounter and ultimately managing the wind down of the nearly 40-year-old company.

Grinberg also discussed being thrust into leadership by his father. Grinberg said watching “The Chief" run three companies -- and becoming a manager himself at Val-Fit -- gave him a leg up when he attended graduate school.

“Many of the case studies being presented in class I was able to relate back to our company because I lived them," Grinberg said. “This proved to be a big advantage for me over my classmates who were coming from entry to mid-level jobs. I learned so much from watching The Chief and developing a relationship with him around the business.”

Grinberg touched on the importance of deciding early on who will lead the company in the next generation and ensuring that the chosen successor is prepared to lead. He also emphasized the importance of having safeguards in place during layoffs or the wind down of a business.

“It could easily happen to your family business, never take that for granted," Grinberg said. "Incorporate a wind down as part of your exit strategy.”

Following Grinberg's talk, Vanessa Claiborne and Riley Busenlener of Chaffe & Associates discussed the importance of understanding what factors go into determining the current value of a business and provided guidelines for identifying a suitable successor or buyer for the family business. Chaffe & Associates, a Tulane Family Business Center sponsor, provides specialized investment banking services including valuations, mergers and acquisitions, and advisory services to clients that include family-owned businesses.

The Family Business Forum is a presentation of the Tulane Family Business Center, a segment of the Albert Lepage Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation at Tulane University's A. B. Freeman School of Business. The Tulane Family Business Center offers a variety of professional education activities for individuals involved in the management of family-owned enterprises.