

# What sports teaches us about achieving successful customer experience

[Laurinda Pang](#)



**October 28, 2020**

Although I live in the heart of the Rocky Mountains, my favorite sports team plays seven time zones away. I'm a fan of international football in general, and FC Barcelona in particular, because I love the beauty and fluidity of the game. At its best, offensive and defensive players work in unison. They know their roles, understand how to move the ball, and seize control of the field of play to deliver results. Good teams, like FC Barcelona, define teamwork at the highest level.



The concept of excellent teamwork was top of mind when I recently chatted with Nick Mehta, the CEO of Gainsight, and the author of two books on the subject of Customer Success, which outlined a philosophy, a discipline, and an organizational approach for ensuring long-term customer relationships.

Talking to Nick is somewhat like drinking from a fire hose. His intellectual interests seem limitless. He can easily shift gears from philosophy to physics to fashion to feminism. His favorite team is the Pittsburgh Steelers, and he made it clear that he has trained his family and friends not to interrupt him when a football game is on.

It was a fun conversation. But why all the focus on teams? Nick argues in his books (and I agree with him) that digital transformation has changed the traditional relationship between sales and support. In the past, the initial purchase defined who owned the client relationship, generally the

sales team that secured the business. Now we see the purchase as the starting point of an overarching journey in which customer needs change over time and solutions need to be organic.

### **A New Model Built Around Teamwork**

This reality requires a higher degree of partnership and learning, so we can make the necessary adjustments along this journey. At Lumen, we have dedicated resources to make sure a customer doesn't travel alone. At the same time, we are beginning to implement institutional changes within our organization that make it clear that everyone has a role in driving Customer Success.

Consider the flight of a soccer ball during a match between FC Barcelona and its arch-rival Real Madrid. The Barça goalie inbounds the ball to a defender who quickly passes it to a midfielder. He dribbles between defenders before spotting a striker on the wing and sends the ball his way. The striker rushes the Real Madrid goalie, who comes out to meet him, and then he quickly sends the ball across to the goal area to a teammate who knocks it into the open net. Goal!

Just as several players touch a soccer ball as it travels across the pitch, a successful customer journey requires multiple "touches" as well. It's a true organizational commitment, not just the responsibility of one team or department. With the right execution, teams can "score" time and time again.

### **Avoiding Fumbles Along The Way**

But even good teams can commit unforced errors. One mistake is to offer digital engagement only for small customers under the guise of being cost effective. Digital tools make sense for clients of all sizes. In fact, some "large" clients are really just a group of "smaller" clients within an organization. Finding the right balance between digital engagement and human interaction helps you to avoid fumbles.

Understanding the health of a client relationship is also important. In sports, good teams protect the health of their players with smart training and sensible nutrition. In business, we need to synthesize the data and human perspectives we gather along the customer journey into a set of consistent, diagnostic metrics. We are currently working with Nick and Gainsight to use their expertise to create these digital "temperature checks," which will allow us to be smarter and faster in our ability to anticipate and react to customer needs.

### **For The Love Of The Game**

Nick and I see a clear similarity between sports and successful client experiences. Both require a level of passion and dedication. "Success is no accident," said soccer legend Pele. "It is hard work, perseverance, learning, studying, sacrifice and most of all, love of what you are doing or

learning to do.” We love to transcend the original transaction that started a customer relationship, so that we can drive to a higher purpose—achieving mutual success for everyone involved, today and tomorrow. In doing so, we can accomplish in business something rarely seen in sports. Everybody leaves the field a winner.

<https://news.lumen.com/team-sports-customer-experience>