

# WORLD FOOTBALL SUMMIT MADRID STUDENT BRIEFING INSIGHTS REPORT



## *How to Become a Top Executive in the Football Industry?*

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# BUILDING CHAMPIONS OFF THE PITCH: The New Playbook for Football's Next Generation of Leaders

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**N**o one becomes a football executive overnight. The path to leadership in this fiercely competitive global industry begins at the grassroots: learning, observing, and building credibility from the bottom up. The best executives start small: taking internships, shadowing mentors, and working across departments to understand how a club truly functions. These early steps build humility, empathy, and resilience, which are qualities that define lasting leaders.

Modern football clubs are no longer mere sporting institutions; they are complex organizations at the intersection of sport, business, and culture. To thrive within them, executives must lead through values not just structures. Integrity, teamwork, and accountability sustain performance long after trophies fade. The clubs that succeed are those whose leadership embodies these principles daily, making values their competitive advantage.

Education provides the first bridge into the football business, but adaptability and networking keep you on it. Specialized programs in sports management offer knowledge of finance, governance, and marketing but their greatest value lies in connections. Internships, mentorships, and alumni networks built through these schools often determine who gets the first opportunity.

However, adaptability is what turns opportunity into career growth. A global industry demands leaders who can operate seamlessly across cultures from Europe's memberowned institutions to the committed driven systems of the Gulf. Knowing how to navigate local hierarchies, expectations, and traditions is as important as understanding a balance sheet.

Equally vital is building relationships without expecting immediate returns. Football is a small, interconnected world. Executives who offer help, advice, and integrity earn reputations that open doors later. In an industry where reputation is currency, generosity and authenticity are the most reliable investments.

## THE BUSINESS OF PASSION START FROM THE GROUND UP

Passion may bring you into football, but business acumen keeps you there. Modern clubs are highvelocity enterprises driven by sponsorships, media rights, and digital revenue streams. The best executives know how to blend the emotion of the game with commercial logic ensuring that passion never overrides sustainability.

Multiclub ownership models, now common across Europe and the Middle East, demand a new generation of leaders fluent in global strategy. Managing shared scouting networks, training infrastructure, and finances across several teams requires agility and a corporate mindset without losing local identity. Balancing global efficiency with community belonging is the art form of tomorrow's football executive.

Financial discipline has become a defining skill. With most clubs operating close to losses, executives must diversify revenue, control costs, and plan for longterm resilience. They must also learn crisis management knowing when to restructure, when to sell assets, and when to invest in youth academies that produce both players and stability.

Technology is transforming every aspect of the sport from scouting to performance analytics but it cannot replace human intelligence. The strongest leaders combine digital literacy with empathy, using data to inform decisions while maintaining the human touch that motivates teams and sustains loyalty.

## LEADERSHIP IN AN EVOLVING GAME

Crisis and competition test an executive's true capacity for leadership. Whether rescuing a struggling club or steering a winning one through turbulence, calm under pressure is nonnegotiable. Great leaders act with composure focusing on solutions, not blame. They know when to cut costs, when to invest, and when to trust their people to deliver.

Empowerment has replaced control as the hallmark



of modern management. Today's top executives build strong teams by delegating responsibility, nurturing ownership, and encouraging innovation. When employees feel valued and trusted, clubs become more adaptable, creative, and united.

Patience remains the quiet strength of successful executives. Too many young professionals chase quick promotions without realizing that leadership is a long game. True authority is earned through experience through seasons of wins, losses, and lessons. Those who persevere with humility and purpose become the steady hands that others look to in moments of uncertainty.

Above all, global leadership now demands cultural sensitivity. The modern football ecosystem crosses continents and ideologies. Understanding how to inspire diverse teams and respect local norms is what transforms managers into ambassadors of the game.

## THE FUTURE OF FOOTBALL LEADERSHIP

The next era of football will be defined not by those who win the most titles, but by those who create sustainable

systems that endure. The future executive must balance competitiveness with fairness, profitability with ethics, and technology with humanity.

Sustainability financial, social, and cultural will be the ultimate mark of success. Clubs that manage budgets transparently, invest in youth and women's football, and strengthen community ties will outlast those chasing shortterm gains.

To become a top executive in football is to accept that leadership is not power, but service to the players, the fans, and the game itself. It is about aligning passion with perseverance, intelligence with integrity, and ambition with empathy.

In an industry often driven by spectacle, the true leaders of football will be those who build legacies, not empires. They will understand that the greatest victory is not the one celebrated on the pitch, but the one sustained in the boardroom: the victory of vision, values, and balance.

*\*Editor: Maha Hana Evers, Editorial Director, CP MEDIA*

**CP Media is a youthdriven publishing and convening platform dedicated to fostering dialogue and knowledge exchange among GenZ professionals. Its mission is to empower tomorrow's leaders to find their voice on the defining issues shaping their generation's future. Through its flagship GENZAMIGAS podcast, CP Media amplifies authentic, peertopeer female conversations on all timely and relevant topics, from career goals, to tackling climate change, digital literacy and health & wellbeing. Meanwhile, the GENZBOOMERS podcast bridges generations, creating space for meaningful dialogue and shared learning between emerging and established leaders.**

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# TOP 9 TAKEAWAYS on How to Become a Top Executive in the Football Industry

**Eymeric Moura**

**Partner Continental Europe & Middle-East, Excel Search  
at the World Football Summit Madrid 2025**



**1.**

## **Start Through Football Schools and Build Networks**

Breaking into the football industry is easiest through specialized institutions like the Football Business Academy (FBA), which provide not only the technical foundation of how clubs operate but also powerful networking channels. Such schools open doors to internships, mentorships, and first jobs that would otherwise be unreachable for young professionals.

**2.**

## **Avoid Aiming Too High Too Soon**

Ambition is vital, but early career focus should be on learning, not prestige. Moura urged aspiring executives to start with smaller or lower-division clubs, where responsibilities are broader, exposure is greater, and mistakes become lessons. Real influence begins in modest environments where one's work directly shapes the organization's growth.

**3.**

## **Adaptability is Key Across Cultures**

In a globalized football landscape, cultural agility defines success. Executives must adapt to diverse markets — from Europe's structured boards to Saudi Arabia's committee-based decision systems. Understanding local mentalities, power dynamics, and values allows leaders to navigate complex environments effectively while maintaining trust and credibility across continents and ownership models.

**4.**

## **Embrace Multi-Club Ownership Models**

Moura highlighted the rise of multi-club ownership (MCO), where investors own several teams across leagues. Future executives must understand how to centralize costs, align scouting strategies, and leverage shared resources across clubs. Mastering this interconnected structure will be essential to maximizing both sporting performance and long-term asset value for owners.

**5.**

## **Balance Tradition with the New Investment Wave**

American investors are reshaping European football by introducing franchise-style efficiency and financial discipline. Moura argued that successful executives will blend these innovations with football's traditional culture and community identity. The best leaders will modernize operations while preserving the passion and authenticity that define the sport's emotional connection to fans.

**6.**

## **Build a Reputation on Reliability and Reciprocity**

Football remains an intimate and reputation-based industry. Moura's advice: always go the extra mile for colleagues and mentors without expecting immediate returns. Acts of goodwill — solving problems, supporting others, or delivering quietly — create powerful professional capital. Those who give first eventually earn trust, credibility, and leadership opportunities.

**7.**

## **Hard Work, Loyalty, and Humility Define Growth**

After gaining industry exposure, success depends on consistent effort and modesty. Moura emphasized that rising executives must keep their heads down, execute diligently, and show loyalty to their teams. In such a small, interconnected world, dedication and discretion are noticed quickly, accelerating advancement within clubs and sporting organizations.

**8.**

## **Be Financially Strategic and Player-Focused**

Top executives must balance financial prudence with sporting ambition. When clubs face financial strain, Moura noted, the smart approach is to sell high-value players for liquidity while reinvesting in youth academies to generate future talent. Sustainable success requires aligning footballing strategy with fiscal responsibility to ensure long-term competitiveness.

**9.**

## **Future Success Depends on Financial Balance**

Moura concluded that football's next era will hinge on economic discipline. With most clubs losing money, sustainable growth demands balanced budgets and fair revenue distribution. The future's top executives will not simply chase trophies but master the financial equilibrium that keeps clubs stable, competitive, and globally relevant.



# TOP 9 TAKEAWAYS on Turning Passion for Football into a Professional Career

**Andres Villamil**  
International Director, FutbolJobs.com  
at the World Football Summit Madrid 2025



**1.**

## **Master Small Roles Before Aiming Big**

Every great football career begins with mastering the smallest responsibilities. Whether you're managing social media for a local team or volunteering as an intern, treat each task like a championship final. Excellence in small roles builds discipline, resilience, and trust — the foundation for leadership and long-term career growth.

**4.**

## **Build a Visible Portfolio, Not Just a CV**

Words on a résumé can't compete with tangible work. Showcase your talent through a personal portfolio — videos, marketing campaigns, research, or analytics projects. Demonstrating what you've achieved gives recruiters confidence in your ability to deliver. In football, proof of performance is far more persuasive than promises of potential.

**7.**

## **Network Intelligently and Authentically**

Relationships are the currency of the football world. Build genuine connections with people at every level — peers, mentors, and executives alike. Stay in touch, offer value, and be respectful of others' time. Networking isn't just collecting contacts; it's nurturing trust that may lead to your next big opportunity.

**2.**

## **Differentiate Beyond Passion**

Passion alone is universal in football — what distinguishes you is skill. Develop specific competencies like communication, teamwork under pressure, analytical thinking, or adaptability. Employers look for individuals who can convert passion into results. Passion without capability fades quickly; skill backed by passion earns recognition and long-term opportunities in the industry.

**5.**

## **Develop an International Mindset**

Football is a global ecosystem spanning 211 FIFA associations. Learn multiple languages and cultivate cultural awareness to communicate across borders. Understanding diverse audiences and customs not only opens international doors but also makes you adaptable to global teams, fan bases, and sponsors that define the modern football industry.

**8.**

## **Be Ready When Opportunity Knocks**

Opportunities often appear when least expected — at conferences, casual meetings, or chance encounters. Always be prepared with a polished portfolio, professional appearance, and readiness to engage. Preparation creates luck. When you stay sharp and informed, you can seize moments others miss and turn them into defining career breakthroughs.

**3.**

## **Be Innovative and Create Opportunities**

If a role doesn't exist, invent it. Identify gaps — maybe a club lacks an international department or digital strategy — and propose concrete solutions. Innovation signals initiative and vision. Rather than waiting to be hired, design your own path by showing clubs how your idea can solve a real need.

**6.**

## **Leverage Technology and Stay Ahead of Trends**

Technology is reshaping football — from data analytics and virtual experiences to AI-driven fan engagement. Stay curious and learn how digital innovation enhances performance, marketing, and fan connection. The professionals who thrive are those who anticipate future needs and integrate technology to create new dimensions of football experience.

**9.**

## **Protect Your Professional Image**

In a connected world, your social media presence is part of your résumé. Recruiters will review how you represent yourself online. Use your platforms to reflect professionalism, respect, and your passion for sport. Avoid content that undermines your credibility. Your digital footprint should project the image of a future industry leader.





# TOP 9 TAKEAWAYS on How to Become a Top Executive in the Football Industry

**Iñaki Zoco Ostiz**  
**Associate Director, Catenon**  
**at the World Football Summit Madrid 2025**



**1.**

## **Start from the Bottom and Learn Relentlessly**

Zoco urges aspiring executives to begin their careers humbly, taking on entry-level roles to understand how football organizations function from within. By listening to experienced mentors and engaging with every layer of the club, young professionals gain the perspective, patience, and respect necessary to later manage people and decisions effectively.

**2.**

## **Value People as Much as Performance**

He emphasizes that leadership in football extends beyond strategy and structure—it's about managing people with empathy and consistency. Successful executives know how to motivate staff, nurture team spirit, and build cultures of trust. Football is ultimately a people business, and those who prioritize relationships sustain long-term success.

**3.**

## **Take Time—Don't Rush Success**

Zoco warns against impatience and the desire for quick success. Many young professionals fail by seeking instant recognition instead of gradual growth. True executives develop their expertise and emotional maturity over time, learning from mistakes and experiences. Building a career in football management is a marathon, not a sprint.

**4.**

## **Blend Sporting and Business Intelligence**

Modern football clubs are complex organizations that merge competition with commerce. Zoco believes the best executives combine knowledge of the sport—players, coaching, scouting—with business acumen in branding, sponsorships, and financial management. This dual mastery enables them to make informed decisions that sustain both on-field and off-field performance.

**5.**

## **Uphold Core Human Values in a Data-Driven Era**

Although technology and analytics are transforming football, Zoco insists that leadership remains a deeply human endeavor. Empathy, integrity, and emotional intelligence cannot be replaced by algorithms. Great executives use data as a tool, not a substitute for intuition, and maintain human connection as the foundation of their leadership.

**6.**

## **Build Resilience and Empathy as Cornerstones of Leadership**

For Zoco, resilience defines those who last in football's volatile environment. Executives must handle crises, pressure, and setbacks while inspiring calm and confidence in their teams. Equally vital is empathy—the capacity to understand and support others. When intelligence is guided by empathy, leadership becomes both effective and humane.

**7.**

## **Learn to Adapt Across Cultures and Markets**

Having operated in multiple countries, Zoco stresses that global leadership requires cultural adaptability. What works in Spain may not work in Saudi Arabia or Brazil. Successful executives learn to read local contexts, respect traditions, and tailor their leadership styles to different environments while keeping universal values at the core.

**8.**

## **Balance Education with Practical Experience**

Zoco values formal education, but cautions against relying on it alone. Academic programs offer theoretical grounding, yet real insight comes from practice—working in clubs, handling people, and facing real challenges. The strongest leaders are those who combine intellectual discipline with hands-on experience, constantly learning and evolving on the job.

**9.**

## **Let Passion and Perseverance Drive Your Career**

Zoco concludes that passion and perseverance are the defining traits of top executives. Passion fuels creativity and commitment; perseverance sustains focus during hardship. Talent alone won't secure success—what distinguishes great leaders is their ability to stay motivated, keep improving, and pursue excellence no matter how long the journey takes.

