

# Navigating Your Professional Path from CSUEB Alumni & Three-Time Emmy Winner Leanne Cozart

*As a woman in a male-dominated industry, Cozart is proof that with dedication and drive, success is attainable*

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Cozart's education was not traditional. She transferred to four different colleges around the country, changed her major multiple times, and pushed herself to find what she described as her "North Star."

"Figure out your North Star," Cozart echoed throughout the interview. Defined as your end goal or the driving force behind your passion. Identifying your "North Star" and continuing to pursue it is a crucial step in furthering yourself and succeeding in your career. It will evolve as your interests and education do, and if you cannot find it? Talk to your professors and those closest to you.

"Check in with your friends and family; they know you the best. They know what makes you tick and what you're passionate about. So if you're trying to navigate figuring out what your north star is, chat with your professors, chat with your closest friends and family, and then sit with yourself for a little bit," advised Cozart.

With interest in sports reporting, she landed on Media Production in the Department of Communication at California State University, East Bay, where she graduated in 2013. Cozart attributes her success now to her professors, including Kevin Pina and Lissette Poole, who pushed her outside of her comfort zones, learning skills from technical production to camera work.

"Looking back, knowing what I know now and knowing about the opportunities that I got... I wouldn't have gotten to do those things at ESPN; I got to help make a video for the president [of the company]," she detailed.

Cozart goes back to the theme of pushing yourself and overcoming internal dialogue of doubt as a true signifier to her success, becoming the first in her nuclear family to go to college, graduate, and jet start a career in some of the most well-known companies, including ESPN. Among ESPN, she's held positions with the NFL Network, Golden State Warriors, eBay, Walmart, and in her most recent role Meta (formerly known as Facebook).

Through her work with the Warriors, Cozart garnered three Emmy awards and was part of the team's 2015 NBA

championship. Nonetheless, she ac-credits some of her success to her ability to take necessary risks to grow within her professional space. "To know deep down that I needed to make that pivot to continue my trajectory of growth, I think that's a good skill to have, and I'm proud of myself reflecting on that, that I'm able to know when to do that and when to take those risks," said Cozart.

Throughout Cozart's search for different roles, she circled back to the importance of personal branding. Building your brand is crucial in developing your persona and marketing it to potential employers. Cozart gravitated to none other than the world's largest professional network on the internet, LinkedIn. "It was something that I did all the time. If there was a dream job I wanted, you know, back in the day, if it were for sports, I'd look up a producer who worked for a sports team, and I'd look at their LinkedIn to see what their experience was, what they were doing, and who they were connected with," she added.

With currently over 500+ connections on LinkedIn, it's evident that Cozart stayed true to the professional platform. She encourages upperclassmen to build their brand and "connect like crazy." Lastly, Cozart stressed the important aspect of connecting within your sphere that already exists: the classroom and building those relationships with your professors for personal and professional advice even after graduation.

It's those connections that have helped Cozart kick start her career in the world of sports and tech. Cozart has held positions in male-dominated fields throughout her career, including marketing and content production roles at sports organizations and now in the tech industry. At times, she was the only woman in the room.

"I think something that's helped me is confidence. When I worked in sports, I got to a point where I was confident in my ability and knowledge and owned and executed on that. It didn't even cross my mind when I was in a conference room, and there were 20 men in the room and then me," discussed Cozart.

As an intern, initially, it did intimidate her knowing that she was the only woman, but as she's grown in her career, she's equally "grown in confidence and skill sets." Cozart said, "I almost feel like I show up, and I have this presence about me, where I'm [rightfully] taking up my space."

Pushing through your doubt and finding confidence is another crucial component of succeeding in your dream career. Some opportunities may present themselves in jobs that don't precisely align with your north star, but they may help redirect you.

Coming out as a fresh graduate presents a new set of unique challenges suited

to your major and the experience gained throughout college. What's one way to stand out from others? Internships.

"Internships were huge because I could say, OK, I didn't have a job related to this, but I interned and was able to put those skills into practice. And having articles published in the Pioneer, as well as reports on the television show, those were crucial to building a portfolio," recalled Cozart.

As a junior or senior, there's one thing in mind, the frightening reality of life after graduation. As the deadline approaches, the panic of entering the "real world" is heightened. Like many, Cozart shared that same fear, bracing herself as she ventured into the workforce.

Following graduation, Cozart landed a dream job as a Creative Assistant and later Communication Coordinator at ESPN. She was tasked with climbing the corporate ladder. Her boss encouraged her to seek advice from her superiors. She recalled his response was, "everyone's gotta eat, and everyone's gotta drink." As a result, Cozart invited ESPN's "higher-ups" to converse over coffee or lunch.

"That's really where I shifted my focus," said Cozart. "I kept myself busy, nearly every day I was meeting with someone, like the Vice President of ESPNW for coffee... I was going for it."

Carrying that same mentality from her years as an undergraduate, she was able to remain just as ambitious within her new professional space. Cozart advises recent and soon-to-be graduates to "not lose the hunger that you have in college and to treat your first job as another area to learn and to soak up knowledge."

Between a full course load, part-time jobs, internships, and her involvement



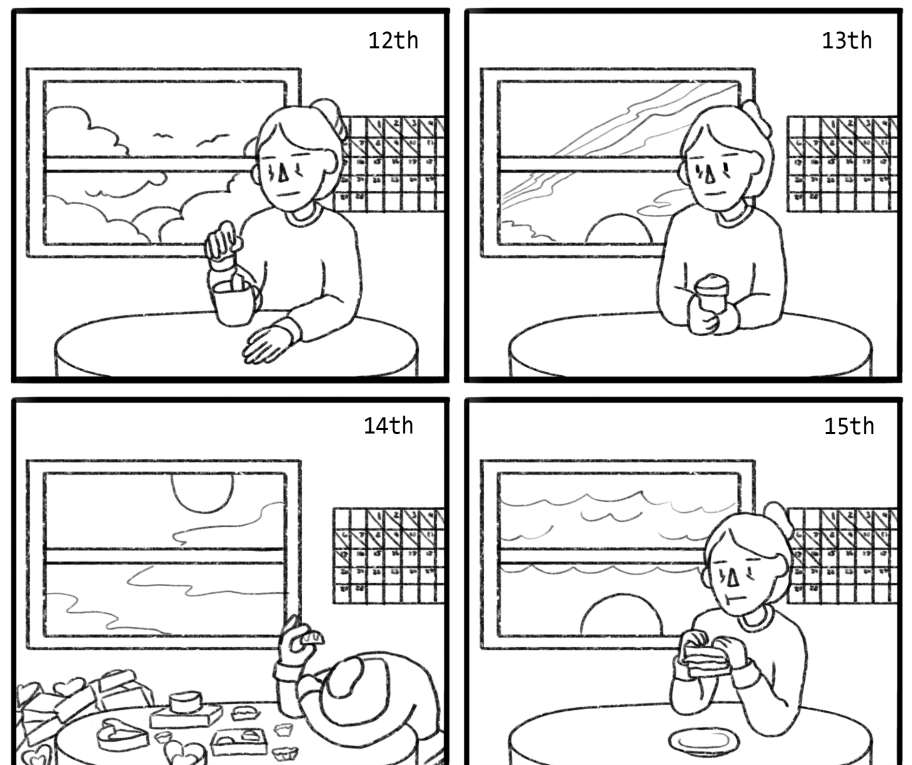
PHOTO BY LEANNE COZART

in the university's television/newspaper outlets, navigating her early twenties was no small feat. Like many college students, it takes long nights and late hours to afford the luxury of life in the Bay Area.

To this day, Cozart's so-called "boot camp mindset" remains among her arsenal of motivational tools, proving useful as she embarks on her journey with Meta. With her nose to the grindstone, Cozart viewed her 20s as a period of determination, working an average of seven days per week while devoting her spare time to networking and building lasting connections from employer to employer.

During those seemingly endless nights, she found solace in her understanding that "it's not going to be like this forever." She urges students especially to remember that "there is a light at the end of the tunnel—I know that's hard to hear when you're in the middle of a struggle because it feels endless, but I promise you, it's not."

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