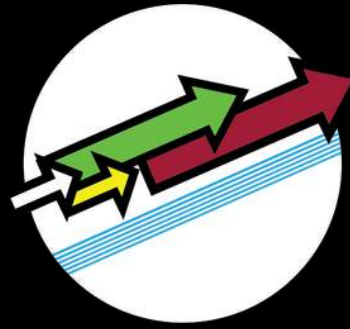


**LTSB**



# The Workplace

Case Studies



# Introduction

The following case studies are based on the real experiences of young people on the LTSB programme. In some cases, the experiences of several young people have been combined, or the actions of one manager has been attributed to a different scenario. Aspects have been exaggerated for effect. The names here do not refer to any actual apprentices or managers.

## **When reading these case studies, consider the following:**

- The case studies are written from the perspective of the characters. People can misunderstand, bring unconscious or conscious bias, or just be plain wrong. Where do you disagree with the characters? What haven't they realised?
- Generally, even if they're not acting in their own best interest, people do things for a reason. What are the reasons behind the decisions and actions in the case studies? Can you understand the reasoning if not the decision? Can you understand the conditions under which people are acting, and how that can have an impact?
- Most of the case studies have a manager-apprentice relationship at the heart of it, but there are often additional characters involved. What would their perspective be? How does the situation impact them?

## **To prepare for the group discussion, make a note of:**

- What the apprentice has done well
- What the manager / firm has done well
- What the apprentice needs to improve, and how
- What the manager / firm needs to improve, and how
- What practical steps needs to be taken immediately to improve the working conditions for all involved – don't just consider productivity (getting work done), but happiness as well.



# Amina, 17

**On her first day, Amina was finishing up before heading back home, excited about her brand new career. Her manager, Steve, looked up from her desk: "One last thing. I'm here to manage you, not to do your work – if you can't do it, or can't keep up, I don't have the time to cover for you."**

Steve had recently been made a team lead, and didn't know he was getting an apprentice until a few days before Amina arrived. "Apprentices are okay, I suppose," he said loudly over lunch, eating a sandwich at his desk. "But the work we do here is pretty complicated, and frankly I'd rather have a grad with a bit of life experience instead. No offence, Amina."

Amina just nodded, and tried to get back to work. She was trying as hard as she could, but there was so much new material for her to understand, and it was really technical. When she went to Steve for help he always made a huge deal of it, and now she was afraid to ask. Maybe Steve was right. Maybe Amina just wasn't ready for this level of work.

For a few months, Amina felt like she was barely surviving each day. She began to dread work, and would worry about it all night. She wasn't sleeping or eating well. She started to miss deadlines, and when Steve asked about something she'd forgotten, she instinctively lied: "I never got that email, sorry. Can you resend?" There had been some IT issues last week, so it was plausible.

**When she went to Steve for help he always made a huge deal of it, and now she was afraid to ask. Maybe Steve was right. Maybe Amina just wasn't ready for this level of work.**

Steve frowned and went quiet. Amina quickly deleted the original from her Inbox and then deleted her Trash box too.

**Claire**, who sits near her desk, worried about her. She asked Amina if she was ok, and whether she was settling in. Amina didn't want anyone to know that she was struggling, so she always smiled: "Everything's fine!" Amina kept refusing Claire's offer of lunch – she usually ate at her desk so she didn't fall further behind – until eventually Claire insisted.

"Come with me. I'm buying, don't worry! We need to talk." Claire took her to a café nearby with a few other people from the office. One of the department heads, **Lorraine**, was there too. They had pots of tea and sandwiches, and looked relaxed with each other, like they did this all the time. It felt completely different from the way they all were in the office.

While pouring Amina tea, Lorraine said, "I hear you've got Steve. Sorry about that." A few of the other laughed. "He's brilliant at technical functions, but from what Claire tells me he hasn't been very welcoming. But when he first started, fresh out of uni, he was useless. Didn't know how to write an email, seemed terrified of the phone. We spent time helping and encouraging him. Everyone needs that at the beginning."



# Calvin, 19

**As the eldest of five, Calvin, 19, is used to helping out around the house. When his mum is working a late shift, he's in charge of getting dinner ready (and stopping fights). Being a big brother is a big part of who he is.**

When he got his apprenticeship, his mum was proud – but also worried about how the house would manage without him. She works as a carer, and her shifts are unpredictable. She knows if she ever turns down work she'll get fewer hours, so she never feels like she can say no.

When she found out Calvin's job was hybrid, she was relieved. It makes a huge difference to have him around, and it would save money on commuting. But six months into the job, Calvin feels like the pressure is building on both sides. At work, they expect more from him. He excelled in some early tasks, so **Bola**, his manager, put him on additional projects. "You'll find these interesting," she said, "And it'll be good to meet some other people, learn some new things."

Sometimes Calvin thinks it would be better if he'd just kept his head down rather than standing out: he'd have much less to do, and little things at home were eating into his work day.

**When Calvin finally got back, there were forty emails, ten calls, and a dozen messages on his work phone.**

One of the kids would be ill, and he'd have to look after them while working. Or he'd realise there was nothing in for lunch: there was a shop on the corner but the cheaper one was 20 minutes away. And their WiFi was rubbish, and kept dropping out in the middle of meetings! But when he told his mum he would just go into the office more frequently, she got annoyed: it was a waste of money, she said, and would make life harder for her.

Today was a school holiday, so his two younger brothers were at home while his mum worked. The boys had a massive fight, which started as a joke and ended up with bloodshed. When Calvin finally got back to his bed, where he worked, there were forty emails, ten calls, and a dozen messages on his work phone. He realised he'd been away for over an hour.

"Sorry!" he texted Bola. "Internet went down." She rang him immediately but he couldn't face explaining anything right then. He watched as the phone kept flashing. It stopped, finally.

Bola left a voicemail: "Calvin, we need to talk. There's always some reason you go missing. What's going on? If your WiFi fails, why don't you text? Why am I spending so much time chasing you?"

Calvin didn't know how to reply. Bola would never understand. No one understood what he was dealing with. He should never have applied for the job in the first place.



# Danny, 19

**Danny has been working for ten months in a young team at a large company. They pride themselves on having a fun culture, and Danny gets on with everyone.**

They go out drinking on Fridays, and Danny gets stuck in. One night, he threw up after doing Jaeger shots with his manager, and got the nickname "Danny, Champion of the Hurl". In the office, everyone now calls him 'Champ'.

Danny scraped through his probation after an extension, but he recognises it was probably more because his manager and team liked him than because he was good at his job. He still makes a few errors, but now his work is always checked by his office buddy, **Jaheda**. He usually gets it mostly right. He usually gets in mostly on time.

He plays in the office football team, which is great for networking. There are a couple of department heads who play, and Danny reckons going for beers with them after the match will probably help his career – at least they know who he is, and they don't know any other apprentices!

**Danny still couldn't remember anything from last night, apart from people chanting, "Champ! Champ! Champ!"**

In the run-up to the office Christmas party, everyone was excited. "It's been a massive year for us," said **Dave**, his line-manager. "We deserve a bit of a blow-out." The firm has put on a dinner and free bar, and rented a great venue. The office closed up at 3pm – "so the girls can get their outfits sorted," said Dave – and most of the guys went to the pub to wait for the party to start.

By the time they got to the venue for dinner, Danny was already drunk. Things were okay for a while, but after shots with the lads from the football team, it all got a little blurry. He woke up at home being shouted at by his mum, feeling awful. He realised he was late for work, and rushed in.

There was a strange atmosphere in the office. A lot of people were hungover, and there were lots of conversations about what happened the night before, but they seemed to be avoiding him. A few said things like, "Surprised to see you in today."

Danny still couldn't remember anything from last night, apart from people chanting, "Champ! Champ! Champ!"

After lunch, he was called into Dave's office, and found someone from HR there too. "Your behaviour was inexcusable last night," Dave said. "What you've done is a serious issue, as well as incredibly disrespectful of the opportunity we've given you here. I'm really disappointed."



# Jessica, 21

**Jessica is used to doing things by herself. She left home when she was 18, supporting herself with temporary jobs to pay rent and bills. It was difficult, but now she's finally got the opportunity to start her career.**

After years of physical jobs like waitressing and tending bar, Jessica knows how to work hard. But whenever she imagined her future, it's been dressed sharp, paid right, and walking into a tall glass building with a giant lobby. Just like the one opposite the café she worked in last year. She looked at the revolving doors every day, and told herself: "That will be me. Soon."

So she couldn't believe her luck when she got the job - and then everything in her personal life started to go wrong, just as her professional life was going right.

Her long-term relationship ended. Even though work felt impossible, she couldn't imagine talking to Jon, her boss, about it. And then her grandma died. When she told Jon he made all the right noises, and told her to take time off for the funeral. But Jessica could tell he didn't really understand. Her grandma had been part of her life almost every day.

**Something about webcams felt more intrusive than just being seen. She is engaged in meetings, but the effort of looking engaged actually makes it harder to pay attention.**

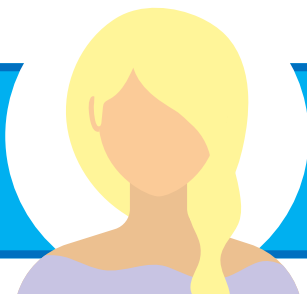
Suddenly, everything was too much. It got harder to wake up. She argued with flatmates. She's crying a lot.

Jessica thought that working from home twice a week meant she could better hide how she was feeling - but everyone was told that webcams had to be on, and having to see her face all day was exhausting. Something about webcams felt more intrusive than just being seen. She is engaged in meetings, but the effort of looking engaged actually makes it harder to pay attention.

Jon noticed that she is quiet and withdrawn, but they haven't had much of a chance to get to know each other. It's a busy team, and in work hours, all anyone talks about is work. They've started doing in-person events after Covid, but Jessica leaves early or doesn't come at all. This might just be what she's like?

Jon asks if she's ok, but Jessica explains her situation badly, leaving things out: it's complicated, and it feels like everyone is going through something at the moment. Jon refers her to the company online mental health webinar.

"And how is that going to help?" Jessica thinks. "What will it change?"



# Amber, 18

**Amber works for an accountancy firm that specialises in supporting small businesses. She has been there for six months and started strongly, passing her probation with flying colours, but recently has been struggling with time-keeping. Her new manager, Esther, is concerned about her motivation.**

There has been disruption on Amber's route to work: the railway line is shut for maintenance for a few months, and she now has to get two buses. This means her journey has gone from 45 minutes to around an hour and fifteen, depending on traffic. She used to get up earlier to make sure she had her hair and make-up done, but now just tries to be on time. She's been 10-15 minutes late twice a week for the last three weeks. She feels tired constantly.

Amber got on with her last manager, **Sarah**, who left the company a month ago. They hit it off straight away, would go out for drinks, and Amber felt she was more of a friend than a manager. She could come to Sarah with any problems, personal or professional. That isn't true of Esther, who is quiet and focussed on work: she often stays late and seems stressed.

Amber takes pride in her work, and doesn't want to hand in it until she's sure there aren't any errors. Sarah understood this, and was flexible on deadlines. Esther expects the work sooner: what Sarah wanted in four days, Esther wants in three. Amber's just about managing this, but feels under much more pressure and she's started making errors.

**The railway line is shut for maintenance, and Amber now has to get two buses. This means her journey has gone from 45 minutes to around an hour and fifteen, depending on traffic.**

Today, Amber went for lunch with **Charlie**, and told him how she feels. He said that there's been a big increase in the amount of business the company has taken on recently, and they haven't hired any new staff to cover it – apparently, a lot of the managers are worried about the workload.

Unfortunately, Amber and Charlie were so engrossed in their conversation that they came back 20 minutes late from lunch-break. When she got to her desk, Esther asked to have 'a quick word'.

"You were 10 minutes late this morning, and 20 minutes late from lunch," Esther says. "There is so much that needs doing, and when you're not here or making errors it means other people have to pick up the slack. I think you need to consider what you want out of your career. It just feels like you don't really want to be here."



# Asha, 18

**Asha hates her boss. It's her first job, and it isn't how she imagined. Ever since she started eight months ago at a large professional services firm, Michelle has been giving her a hard time.**

She's always going on about how Asha can get better, and nothing ever seems good enough for her. She keeps a record of Asha's arrival times from the swipecard data, and if she's even one minute late Michelle turns a cell on a spreadsheet red and sends her a copy of it by email.

The emails drive Asha mad. It never feels like Michelle talks to her – it's always an email, even though they sit right next to each other. If they do talk about anything, Asha will then immediately get an email with everything they just said written down. It feels like evidence is being collected.

Every Monday they meet to review the deadlines and required work from Asha for that week. Even though this takes an hour, every week without fail Michelle will change her mind and ask Asha to do something different – and usually needs it to be done quickly too, which is annoying as Asha likes to schedule her tasks in advance so she doesn't fall behind.

And yet, Asha thinks, Michelle has breakfast at her desk in the morning, which isn't really working. Asha doesn't understand why Michelle can talk to her about punctuality, when she's no better: by the time she's finished breakfast she's as good as late. Whenever she goes out for lunch, she always takes her time. It doesn't seem fair.

**The emails drive her mad. It never feels like Michelle talks to her – it's always an email, even though they sit right next to each other.**

There's a WhatsApp thread of about 15 of the apprentices at the firm, and one of them messaged to say that he saw Asha looking bored and annoyed at her desk. Her reply – which contained many swear words and rude things about Michelle – got lots of LOLs and Crying Laughing emojis, and then she forgot about it.

The following Monday, instead of talking about the expected workload, Michelle asked Asha to look at something on her laptop. It was a cropped screenshot of Asha's messages to the group.

"Why do you think it's appropriate to send this message? What would you think is the right way for me to proceed, bearing in mind how you've spoken about me here?"





# Mohammed, 20

**Mohammed has been working for three months in a small tech start-up. The culture is busy and committed. Everyone knows that the first few years are critical to the success of the venture. Mohammed is their first apprentice.**

Mohammed is quiet, reserved, and has had trouble integrating into the team. At the office, there's not much conversation outside of work issues, and he has felt awkward asking for help because it feels like he's interrupting his co-workers. There was one process he's been struggling with, and his manager, **Jamie**, was clearly frustrated when he had to explain to Mohammed for the third time. Even though everyone else is busy, Mohammed doesn't have much to do and is often bored. He's been caught a few times on his phone.

Some of the team go out for lunch together, but the first few times he was invited Mohammed said no because he had packed a lunch. He feels very different from everyone else, even though they've been always been nice. When the weather was good, everyone ate together at the park opposite and he really enjoyed it, but it's been raining for the past couple of weeks.

Every other Thursday everyone goes for drinks and snacks at the pub opposite, and the boss lets everyone out half an hour early. Mohammed has an orange juice and tries to join in, but leaves after an hour or so along with a few others. He has recognised that a lot of the plans and decisions the company makes are based on conversations during these Thursday night drinks.

**Even though everyone else is busy, Mohammed doesn't have much to do and is often bored. He's been caught a few times on his phone.**

This week, he went directly home instead of going to the pub first, which he's seen **Carla** do – she's about to go on maternity leave, and is his closest colleague. He's worried what will happen after she's gone.

The next day, Jamie asked Mohammed to come into a meeting. With a member of the HR team, Jamie outlined various concerns, including attention to detail, punctuality, and a failure to integrate with the team.

"I'm really disappointed that you disappeared yesterday," said Jamie. "We had an expectation that you will be there, and you didn't even let anyone know you weren't coming. That's not just unprofessional, it's rude in general."

With Mohammed's probation period coming up in a month, Jamie makes it clear that Mohammed will not pass unless things change quickly.



# Matthew, 21

**Matthew loves his office. No one wears formal clothes unless there's a big meeting with a client, and generally everyone is in smart casual.**

He's a noticeable guy – six three, with big hair – and he likes being the centre of things. Almost everyone else in the company is white, which he found really strange at the beginning: having lived in a big city with every type of person on the street, it's a weird transition to walk into the office and leave that all behind. It took him a while to adjust, but now he feels he can be himself.

While the dress code is relaxed, sometimes that's the only thing: there's a lot of high pressure deals being made, and early on Matthew realised that sometimes you have to keep your head down until a storm passed.

He takes the way he looks very seriously. He turned up on his first day in a suit, and his manager, **Rebecca**, told him he didn't need to. He tried to dress like the other guys in jeans and a buttoned shirt, with leather shoes, but that felt just as uncomfortable as wearing a suit. Some people wore trainers to 'walk into work', but never changed out of them, so Matthew developed his own 'work wardrobe': usually trainers, jeans and a t-shirt. Rebecca has raised an eyebrow at some of his outfits, but hasn't said anything, so he's sure it's ok.

He gets on well with Rebecca and the rest of his team, who are supportive: helping him hit deadlines, making sure his work is okay. They hang out a lot after work, and he's happy.

Recently though, he's been getting weird looks from the senior managers.

**He tried to dress like the other guys in jeans and a buttoned shirt, with leather shoes, but that felt just as uncomfortable as wearing a suit.**

He'd just bought some ear-rings and got his nose pierced, but lots of people have ear-rings, and **Praveena** in Marketing has a nose-ring – although she has a small ring on the nostril, and he has a barbell through his septum.

There wasn't much on, so Matthew was leaning back in his chair, playing Candy Crush with his headphones in. He was a little annoyed because he'd got coffee on his brand new white trackies – the jacket and the bottoms, somehow – and he wanted to get home to make sure it washed out.

"What?" he said, as he pulled out his earphones to find one of the department heads, Roger, standing behind him, looking furious.

"I said: 'Why are we paying you?' You dressed ridiculously for any office, and now you're messing about on your phone while the rest of us are working. So I'm asking you again. Why should we keep paying you? Why shouldn't you just clear your desk right now?"



# Lily, 20

**Lily is 6 months into her apprenticeship and feels as if it is going well. Her team is diverse and accepting, and when she decides to come out as transgender everyone makes a big effort to make her feel accepted.**

Because of this, it confuses her when no one in her team speaks up for her when a manager from another team, **Sarah**, misgenders her. Her own manager, **Liam**, introduced her as Lily, and used 'she' when speaking about her, but when Sarah referred to them collectively as "you boys" and mentioned "his" hard work, Liam said nothing, even though Lily could not hold back her flinch. Scared of speaking out to a manager she didn't know, Lily kept quiet, but she was anxious and distracted for the rest of the meeting.

After that, Lily struggles to be as open with her team. She wonders if they use the correct pronouns when she isn't around, and finds it hard to trust them. She has also started to call in sick when she knows that there will be a meeting with people outside of her team. The thought of being misgendered again, and either having to speak up for herself or say nothing and endure it, is painful. This has impacted her progress, and although Liam speaks highly of her to colleagues, very few have met her and so she is often overlooked for projects that she would really enjoy.

**Lily wonders if her team uses the correct pronouns when she isn't around, and finds it hard to trust them. She has also started to call in sick when she knows that there will be a meeting with people outside of her team.**

Liam calls Lily into the office for a meeting. He asks why she is never around when they interact with other parts of the company. He was really disappointed when he recommended her for a project, and his colleague didn't follow up because he had no idea who Lily was.

At first Lily is evasive, but eventually she tells Liam that she is scared to meet other people because Liam will not correct them if they refer to her as a man. Liam is surprised to hear this – he has always been supportive of her. When Lily brings up the meeting they had previously, Liam tells her that he hadn't said anything because he wasn't sure if she wanted people outside of their team to know that she was transgender, and he wanted her to be in charge of that decision. He didn't know that correcting people herself caused Lily a lot of anxiety.

The meeting ended a little awkwardly, and it isn't clear to Lily what will be different in the future, and what she's responsible for resolving on her own.



# Conor, 18

**Conor has had a big few months. He's got a new job, and now he's got a girlfriend too.**

Well, *almost*.

**Kimberly** works in another team in the office, but Conor can see her from his desk (if he pushes his chair back a bit). They spend all day looking at each other, and he always makes sure he takes his lunch at the same time - recently one of her team, **Samantha**, has been a bit of a third wheel, but they're in the staff canteen anyway so it's not too big a deal.

There's a WhatsApp thread for all the apprentices, which is how he got Kimberley's number. Whenever there's a good new show on Netflix he always sends her the recommendation, and she has sent him a thumbs up emoji a few times so they've got the same taste.

When Conor asked Kimberley out the first time he could tell she was embarrassed. He was nervous. He wanted to talk to her alone but the only chance he had was when she went to the bathroom - so he timed it just as she was heading back to her desk. She blushed and sort of rushed away, and he realised he probably hadn't planned it very well.

The next time, he waited around by her car in the parking lot, but she took a surprisingly long time to leave work and unfortunately it was already dark when she arrived. She said she had to get home because her mum was ill. He messaged her over the weekend saying he hoped her mum felt better.

**The next time, Conor waited around by her car in the parking lot, but Kimberly took a surprisingly long time to leave work and unfortunately it was already dark when she arrived. She said she had to get home because her mum was ill.**

When he next came into his shift, Conor was surprised to see that Kimberley had moved to a different desk. No matter how far he pushed his chair back he couldn't pick her out across the bank of desks and monitors. He wandered over to see if he could strike up a conversation - the printer was near there, which gave him an excuse - but when he got there, Samantha was very weird with him: "What do you want?" she asked. "Why are you over here?"

Kimberly didn't even look up, she was so embarrassed at how Samantha was behaving.

Later that afternoon, Conor's manager, **Keith**, asked if he could have a meeting. "There's been a complaint about your behaviour. You've made someone who works here feel very uncomfortable, and unsafe at times. They say you've been staring at them in the office, and following them around. You've been texting them directly without their consent, and waiting for them in the dark after work? Can you imagine how that makes them feel?"

# Key Points

## **Consider the context.**

- No one knows everything, but in entry-level roles you're particularly unlikely to have all the information.
- In a business sense, this can mean that there are pressures on management, workload increases or uncertainty that affects your team.
- In a personal sense, everyone is subject to pressures at home – as partners or parents, in terms of physical and mental health.
- So recognise what you may not know, and how that can affect the behaviour of the people you work with. Think about how you can help.

## **Communication is critical.**

- Make sure your manager is informed. If you're having issues, raise them early – don't wait until it feels like everything is going wrong.
- Use your mentors – they are there to help you adjust to a new environment. What do they think? Their experience will be a good guide.
- LTSB can help you have the hard conversations, especially where personal issues are a factor. Keep in touch, and let us act on your behalf!

