

## Induction, Deduction, and Your Career

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

When you look at the way something has been in the past to draw conclusions about the way something always will be, or always is, you are using inductive reasoning. A standard example of induction would be: All grass examined thus far is green. This leads us to conclude (using induction) that all future grass we see will be green and every piece of green grass we see in the future will strengthen this belief.

For example, you likely believe that a flame will burn you if you touch it. Similarly, just about everyone believes that if they jump in the water they will get wet. The beliefs we have about the world are generally based on inductive reasoning. We not only believe things like the sun will set each evening, we also use inductive reasoning to reach conclusions about things such as:

- If we failed at something in the past, we will fail again.
- If we did not get a job in a certain industry in the past, we will fail again.
- If someone hurt us in the past, they will hurt us again.
- If we are hurt in the past when we tried something, we will be hurt when we try it again.
- If we made a mistake doing something in the past, we will make the same mistake again.
- If we continue doing something the same way we are doing it, we will continue to succeed.
- If we stop doing something the way we are doing it, we will fail.

The list of conclusions we draw about our surroundings and lives are generally based on inductive reasoning. Problems arise when we reach conclusions using inductive reasoning that are simply not true. For example, just because you failed at something in the past does not mean you will fail again. Similarly, if you were hurt when you tried something in the past, it does not mean you will be hurt if you try it again.

The Scottish philosopher David Hume was the first person to raise the problem of induction. He conceived that there was no reason to believe that using inductive reasoning will lead us to the truth. In fact, inductive reasoning and the conclusions we reach about the world and our lives are a problem many people spend a lifetime either enslaved by or attempting to overcome.

- In every city in the United States there are office parks and buildings full of psychiatrists, psychologists, and others.
- There are also countless life coaches and other self-help people out there.
- There are religions which are based on "self-help" and people correcting their beliefs about themselves.
- Bookstores are jam-packed with books to help people overcome their doubts and fears.

*What the entire psychology and self-help industry is largely doing is helping people correct their mistakes in inductive reasoning.* Most people are simply using faulty logic and ideas to evaluate their life.

A couple of years ago I was working with a woman whom I had gotten a job at one of the top 2 or 3 law firms in Los Angeles. Most of the attorneys in the law firm (virtually all of them) went to the top 10 law schools. This woman had gone to a school that was probably ranked around 50 at the time (or thereabouts). When she got to the law firm she did not do well and did not fit in. She also did not keep up with the pace of work. She was intellectually capable of doing the work but just did not work hard enough.

Within around 18 months or so the woman had lost her job. I spoke with the law firm about it at the time and they told me that she had lost her job because she was not working hard enough. Her hours were somewhat unpredictable and she was also not completing assignments in a timely manner. She could not be counted upon to get things done.

She contacted our recruiting firm and started working with another recruiter in the firm to find a job. She did not contact me. When I saw her name in the system, I pulled up her resume to review it. To my astonishment, she had changed the law school she attended from the "top 50" law school to one of the top 5 or 6 law schools in the United States. I immediately called her and confronted her with this fact. What she told me was amazing to me:

She said that she felt she had lost her job because of the law school she had attended. She felt that unless she had another law school on her resume she would never find a good job again. She stated that she felt like a "second class citizen" at the law firm due to her law school and was fired because of her law school. She had reached the following sort of conclusion:

*I lost my job because I did not go to a top law school. I will lose my next legal job unless I have a new law school on my resume.*

I am sure you realize that this logic is nonsensical. Nevertheless, the woman firmly believed this. We, of course, refused to work with her and notified all of the law firms we sent her to about what she had done with the law school on her resume. A few years later I looked her up and could not find her practicing law anywhere in the United States. I am sure a lot of this had to do with the conclusions she reached about her "employability" due to the law school she attended.

Most of us are using some sort of inductive reasoning in how we reach conclusions about our lives and careers. We reach conclusions based on past events that simply are not true. These conclusions are often absolutely crazy and make no sense. In fact, every single person out there is operating under a condition where they are seeing the past and not the present. Because we are seeing the past in most situations, most of us cannot even see what is in front of us in the present (which is the only time there). Because you are not seeing the present, you are, in fact, not really understanding much at all.

If you are seeing just the past then you are seeing an illusion. You are actually blocking yourself from seeing the true nature of what is here and in front of you. You are actually seeing nothing as it really is. You are generally only seeing your past experiences in the things that are in front of you.

Think about your beliefs, about your potential, and life, and how much they are based on just the past. How many conclusions have you reached about the way something is based on what happened previously? How many false conclusions have you reached about your own life and career due to this sort of information?

You are, in fact, limited by faulty beliefs about your past and potential.

When I was around 12 years old, I was climbing a temple in Mexico with my father and I had an experience I will never forget. We had gone to a recently discovered "ruin" and were the only people hiking the temple. There was a chasm that was about 8 feet across that could be jumped to cross between two points of the temple. The only problem with this was that there was a fall of at least 100 feet down if I missed my jump. I would certainly die if I missed the jump.

"Go ahead and jump it if you want," my father told me.

I looked at this jump and was not completely sure I would make it. I was not willing to take that risk with my life.

"Why would you tell me to try that?" I asked my father. I was a little confused.

"Because you need to believe anything is possible," he told me. "I knew you would never jump but you should not be setting limits in your mind about what you can do."

Induction is not the same as deductive reasoning. In the classic example of deductive reasoning we would state: (1) Socrates is a man, (2) and all men are mortal, (3) therefore Socrates is mortal. Here, the facts make the conclusion accurate and true. However, when using induction, the facts about the past do not necessarily settle how the future is going to be. Just because we lost our job in the past due to something does not mean we will again.

In inductive reasoning, we can argue that evidence might not completely support the conclusion but it makes it likely. However, we do not necessarily have any justification for assuming that the future will, more likely than not, be like the past.

In your career and life, it is important that you realize that the past does not equal the future. Realizing when you are using induction incorrectly to reach conclusions about your potential and life can dramatically increase your success when you realize you are not limited about the past. The odds are that your negative conclusions about yourself are simply not true.

### **THE LESSON**

The past does not dictate the future, so you should not use inductive reasoning to make conclusions about your life or career. Recognize when you are making incorrect conclusions based on past events, and switch to deductive reasoning in which you are not limited by the past. You will find your conclusions to be much more accurate, and you will succeed as a result.