

# Law firms staff 'poaching': questionable yet commonplace

Kobus Jonker, a strategy professor at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University's business school warned that the loss of a whole team or certain key personnel to a competitor had severe repercussions for the business model of law and accountancy firms, *Business Day* reports.

Speaking after the latest announcement by a professional firm that some of its key personnel had resigned in order to join a competitor, Jonker raised the question of ethics of poaching skilled persons rather than growing skills from the free market. He said the practice was commonplace because of the dire shortage of highly specialised skills, adding that it was unsurprising that people with highly sought-after skills would move.

Last week law firm Cliffe Dekker Hofmyer announced that three of its partners - Joz Coetzer, Craig Whitley and Nathisha Maharaj - all directors in the finance and banking practice - were moving to competitor Bowman Gilfillan. Earlier, it was announced that the entire mining and resources practice and the banking, financing and capital markets teams of Werksmans Attorneys left for US-based law firm Dewey & LeBoeuf. Brent Williams, Cliffe Dekker Hofmeyr CEO, said it was a loss when personnel who had been with the firm for a long time decided to leave, the effect was far greater if a sizeable number of people from a team or the entire team left at once to work for a competitor. This eroded the company's competitive edge and meant it would have vacancies - but Williams added that the firm still had "immense competency".

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