

The real deal on reward cards

While the idea of getting free travel, gas, or even cash back in exchange for loyal credit card usage is tempting, it takes some legwork to reap the full benefits of a reward card, says Marcia Brixey, author of *The Money Therapist: A Woman's Guide to Creating a Healthy Financial Life*. Follow these tips to get the most bang for your (plastic) buck.

■ **PAY YOUR BALANCE IN FULL.** "If you don't pay your card off on time each month, a reward credit card might not be for you, because most have higher interest rates than traditional cards," says Brixey. Plus, you generally need to pay your entire balance in order to receive reward points. If you tend to

exclusively, recommends Brixey. Using only one card helps you keep tabs on your spending as you rack up points. "To garner even more rewards, use the card to pay for your routine spending, such as utilities and car insurance," she says.

■ **GET YOUR MONEY'S WORTH.** Many reward cards have an annual fee, so be sure that you intend to spend enough over the course of the year to make up for the cost of having the card, says Brixey. For instance, if a cash-back reward card has a \$29 annual fee for 1 percent cash back on all purchases, you'd need to charge a minimum of \$2,900 annually to break even.

■ **FIND REWARDS THAT FIT YOU.** Most rewards entail travel or gift certificates, but there are also savings-plan cards, such as the Futuretrust MasterCard, which invests 1 percent of your purchases into a 529 college savings account. Check out card ratings.com to find the right card for you. —*Anna Davies*



carry debt, try a reward debit card instead. The Cash Bonus Visa Check Card, for example, allows you to earn cash back at a select group of retailers.

■ **STAY LOYAL.** Replace your current card with your new reward card, and use it

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Free \$\$\$ Advice

Q&A WITH DAVID BACH

"My mother asked me to be executor of her will. What do I need to know—and what questions should I ask my mother to make sure her wishes are fulfilled?"



REDBOOK Love Network expert David Bach is the author of seven best-selling books, including *Go Green, Live Rich*.

While no one likes to discuss death, I commend you and your mom for taking care of her estate. Smart planning now will save you a lot of time and heartache later.

As executor of her will, you'll be responsible for overseeing your mother's property and continuing to pay expenses, such as her mortgage, until all of her debts have been settled. You'll also have to notify government agencies, such as the Social Security Administration, of her death.

Filing a will can be complicated, so to get in-depth advice, consult

an estate attorney or pick up *The Executor's Guide: Settling a Loved One's Estate or Trust* by Mary Randolph.

For now, here's what you can do so you and your family will be better prepared when the time comes:

- Review the will and ask your mom any questions. Be frank about discussing potential problems, such as family feuds or a disinheritance.
- Save your own copy of your mother's will. Know where to find her financial records—including life insurance, safety deposit boxes, and investments—along with account numbers, contacts, and passwords.
- Find out who your mother's accountant, banker, lawyer, and any other financial advisers are. Also, get written permission from your mother to hire professionals, such as a lawyer or a CPA, to help in carrying out the will.
- Know your mother's wishes for burial and organ donation—and get them in writing.



Have a money question for David? Email him at moneysmarts@redbookmag.com.