

Welcome to the Freedom Debt Relief monthly newsletter! As part of our ongoing goal to enhance our services, we will be sending you a monthly newsletter filled with interesting articles and helpful financial tips and advice. We hope you enjoy this issue, and that you find the enclosed information helpful as you continue on the road to financial freedom.

# Trade Secrets: Bargaining And Negotiating Might Help You

**B**argaining and negotiating for goods and services isn't a new idea, but it has been gaining popularity among many creative consumers who are thinking outside the box to get a good deal.

How do you bargain for deals? Say, for example, you are a public relations expert. You may be able to offer your services to a local community retailer in exchange for a discount.

A recent article by Reader's Digest revealed that requests for bartered goods and services on craigslist.com, a popular classified-advertising website, increased 125 percent in the past year. The article reported that offers ranged from "litigation services for a reliable van" to simple trades such as "my BlackBerry for your digital camera."

## Where Can You Start?

If you feel you have a marketable skill that others could benefit from, MSNBC.com suggests that you could begin by bartering with local people. This may give you the opportunity to trade face-to-face in a public place such as a restaurant or coffee shop. Consider bringing a friend along with you for safety reasons and also as a witness to the transaction. If you are bartering, dealing locally may spare you the risk of shipping your item.

The Freecycle Network (freecycle.com), an online swap spot, may be able to direct you to local bartering organizations. In addition, barter exchanges might be found through your local chamber



of commerce or through the International Reciprocal Trade Association at Irta.com. The Internet offers a variety of bartering websites to consider including U-Exchange.com, Meetup.com or craigslist.com which has a specific bartering section.

## Another Option...

You may also have some luck scoring a good deal if you prefer plain old negotiation. Today's economy dictates a buyer's market according to the

Associated Press, which adds that although it may be difficult to negotiate better prices on clothing or accessories, it might be easier to negotiate a better price on appliances and electronics.

Before you negotiate, CNNMoney.com suggests researching prices on your particular item of interest. The more information you have before you bargain, the better your chances may be for getting a good deal.

Also, negotiate nicely and consider a deal that would be advantageous to both buyer and seller. If a retailer is trying to get rid of a floor sample, would it be possible to get a discount? If you can think of a way to bring them new business, could they lower the price? If you pay in cash, would that better your chances for a discount? Try to speak with a manager or senior level employee since they are usually the key decision makers.

Of course, there is no guarantee that a retailer will negotiate with you or offer a discount. If you hear 'no' as an answer, CNNMoney.com suggests keeping your cool. Try to remember to be polite or you may get the reputation of being a bad customer.

If you do decide to try bargaining or negotiating, you may want to consider some advice from MSNBC.com: Be careful when dealing with strangers, and remember if you are in business and decide to trade your expertise for products or business services, those transactions



should be reported to the Internal Revenue Service as income.

For more information on bartering and taxes go to irs.gov.

## Swapping Spaces

- **Consider timing.** When thinking about swaps or bargaining, know what you're selling and when shoppers are most likely to buy. For example, antique Christmas ornaments might be highly sought after during the holidays but not as desirable earlier in the year.

- **Home sweet home.** Believe it or not, swapping has become so popular, Internet sites such as GoSwap.org,

Pad4Pad.com and DomuSwap.com are devoted exclusively to real estate exchange.

Of course, if you consider this option at all, you will most likely need a lawyer to oversee the transaction and possibly a licensed 'exchangor' for tax help. If interested, visit the National Council of Exchangers at nce1031.net.

- **Don't forget your pet.** Consider trading pet care with a trusted friend or neighbor.

- **Book swapping.** For details on how to mail a book and get a book in exchange, go to PaperBackSwap.com. Also, you may want to check out Swaptree.com to trade items like books, CDs, DVDs and other media forms.



# Settling Debts, Settling Minds

**S**ettling your debts can be liberating. Once you make a decision to seek the help of a debt settlement program, you should be prepared to make a solid effort to work in concert with your settlement company. The process may be difficult at times, but the goal is not impossible.

Take Margaret as an example of someone who recently completed her settlement program. Several years ago, Margaret found herself in a financial hole so deep that in order to make ends meet each month she used credit cards to pay for groceries and utilities.

"I was able to make only the minimum payments to my credit cards each month and realized that the little progress I was making to decrease my balances was making my situation worse," she revealed.

When her debt got out of control, Margaret researched debt settlement and decided that it was a viable option for her. When she enrolled in the program, she had over \$80,000 worth of debt. Once she worked through her program, Margaret saved over \$31,000, even after her program fees were paid.

"There were times I called very upset and under such pressure from my huge debt," remembered Margaret. "The customer service staff was always so kind and calming. They would even stay in touch with me to see how things were going."

Everyone who has experienced debt knows how stressful the situation can be. Having someone else understand your situation could make an unpleasant experience less difficult. Your debt settlement company should be compassionate and willing to help you.

"All of your staff from the people who answer the phones, to my account managers, to the people in the priority department went above and beyond to help me," said Margaret about her experience.

"Without this program I would have never been able to come as far as I have," said Margaret. "To anyone in this program stay with it because it works. There is a bright light at the end of the tunnel, and (your debt settlement group) will help you find it."



## Credit Corner Card Holders Seeing New Fees, Higher Rates

**M**ore and more credit card holders continue to see new fees on their monthly billing statements as credit card debt continues to increase.

According to a report by ABC News, credit card interest rates went up an average of 20 percent in the first six months of 2009.

Forty-five percent of participants in a survey conducted by Credit.com, a San Francisco-based provider of credit card data, said that within the last several months card companies had either raised rates, imposed higher fees, increased their minimum payment or reduced credit lines, up from 33 percent earlier this year.

USA Today reported that the annual fee is making a comeback with some bank cards. At one point, annual fees were charged to some customers who were considered 'higher risk' card holders.

Now however, many card holders who avoid charging more than a specific amount on their cards each year as well as those who carry a balance that they can easily pay off in full each month are finding themselves being charged an annual fee.

Many consumers are also being penalized with 'inactivity' fees if they don't use their credit cards during a specific period of time.



In addition to escalating interest rates, many credit card holders are finding that rewards programs and promotional rates are also being scaled back by many card issuers.

Fees are also being charged for purchases made outside the United States.

### How Can You Take Action?

Card holders should go over their monthly credit card bill carefully and pay close attention to rate change notices.

If you received a warning from your card issuer that you will be seeing an increased interest rate, USA Today suggests contacting your lender to express dissatisfaction with their changes. Ask the card issuer if they would be willing to waive the fees. If they decline to do so, you always have the option of closing your account.

Transferring your balance to another lower-interest card could be an option, however be aware that some credit card issuers charge customers a fee to transfer balances.

### A Light At The End Of The Tunnel?

CreditCARD Act legislation, initially scheduled to take effect in February 2010, is now slated to go into effect December 1.

The legislation has good intentions - it aims to restrict credit card companies from charging extra fees. Among other unfair practices, credit card companies will also be banned under the new law from charging customers higher interest rates without warning them for a specific period of time in advance.

## A Few Tips To Keep Bank Fees In Check

Credit card rates aren't the only things on the rise. ATM fees have risen for three-consecutive years, monthly service charges in interest-bearing checking accounts are higher and bounced check fees are reaching new heights according to an article by USA Today.

Here are a few tips, courtesy of Bankrate.com, that might help you avoid checking account fees.

- **Think about what you need.** If you just want a basic checking account which includes bill pay option and ATM or debit card transactions, you may want to try a free checking account that doesn't require a minimum balance.
- **Do your research.** Try visiting different bank web sites on the Internet to see what each account offers and to help determine what is right for your needs.
- **Don't bounce checks.** You may want to check your balance daily. Being aware of your balance may help you avoid high overdraft fees. Consider hanging on to your receipts until you have a chance to view your debits and credits as they are posted to your account. In addition, you may want to maintain a paper register.
- **Use your own bank's ATM.** You may want to budget your cash needs on a weekly basis and withdraw the necessary funds from your bank's ATM when you have access to it. Withdrawing funds from ATM machines other than the bank at which you have an account can be costly.

# Buyer Beware: Protect Your Budget With These Tips



**Y**ou've probably seen them - television commercials, ranging from five minutes or longer, promoting everything from cosmetics and exercise equipment to cooking utensils and household gadgets. These infomercials usually feature a persuasive salesperson, hired specifically to get you to spend money. The Better Business Bureau reminds consumers that, if an advertised item is something they really need, they may want to listen carefully to the wording and terminology in advertisements and infomercials before deciding to make a purchase.

- **When you hear the word 'free'...** In some cases, infomercials insinuate consumers will be getting something 'free' or 'extra' if they call in to order an item within a certain period of time.

In many cases, these promotions can entice shoppers to spend over their budget. If you are interested in obtaining a free gift, the Better Business Bureau suggests calculating the cost of the products as a whole to see if the 'free' item is really free and worth what you will spend.

Also, if you are ordering an item that needs shipped, you may want to take these fees into consideration as well.



For a consumer to receive a free gift, the Better Business Bureau says that advertisers must be clear in disclosing what the conditions are of the 'free' gift. Advertisers may not increase

the price of an advertised item or decrease the quantity or quality of the item in conjunction with the free offer.

Sometimes, companies offer free shipping on catalogue or website purchases. You should also think carefully when considering these promotions.

As in the 'free gift' offer, some free shipping offers require consumers to spend a specific amount of money which may cause you to go over budget and purchase items you don't need.

Consider reading the fine print at the bottom of television ads. If you cannot read the print, most television promotions can be ordered online where terms and conditions of your purchase may be more accessible for you to read.

- **Claims like 'best,' 'most' and 'top' are usually objective.** Different consumers have different experiences with products depending on their needs. In many cases, these claims are used by advertisers to persuade consumers into buying their product. If you are considering an item in which an advertiser uses these claims, it may be a good idea to ask friends, family or someone you know if they have used the product and what they think of it. Also, many Internet retail sites allow customers the opportunity to write reviews about products. You may want to read the product reviews before you make a decision to spend money.

- **Hearing phrases such as 'Our prices can't be beat.'** Keep in mind prices for products and services fluctuate regularly. Advertisers may use this phrase as a way to get you into the store quickly, taking advantage of the fact that many shoppers do not have time to do price comparisons.

## freedom DEBT RELIEF

### Client Reminders

#### Working Together To Save Millions

FDR is pleased to announce that it has successfully settled over \$500 million in debt for its clients since its first settlement in 2003. It is a combination of our hard work and your commitment to make your monthly savings deposits on time that allow us to be successful in negotiating with your creditors.

**Creditor Calls:** If you are receiving harassing creditor calls, please remember to use the script that was provided to you in the Welcome Package that was sent shortly after your enrollment. If you do not have a copy of the script or if the creditors are continuing to contact you, please contact our customer service department at the number below and we will be happy to assist you.

#### Refer A Client To FDR For \$

If you know anyone who could benefit from our Debt Reduction Program, tell them to give our team of Debt Specialists a call at 800-544-7211. If they sign up and stay in the program for three months, you will be eligible for a referral fee of \$100.

\*\*\*

**Customer Service Phone No:  
1-800-655-6303**

**FAX No: 650-393-6800**

**Hours of Operation:  
Mon-Thurs: 6:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.  
PST**

**Fri: 6:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. PST  
Sat: 7:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. PST**

**E-mail:  
support@freedomdebtrelief.  
com**

### Did You Know...that you can still give back to those less fortunate without spending a lot of money, if any?

Consider volunteering your time and work experience to a charity or cause. Kiplinger.com recently recognized the National Executive Service Corps, a group of business executives who are retired or have been laid off ([www.nesc.org](http://www.nesc.org)). Members of the Corps donate their development, marketing and finance skills to a variety of nonprofit organizations.

You may also want to think about donating your time at a local homeless shelter, nursing home or hospital where caring people are always needed to help prepare meals or visit with residents. If it's the holiday season, go to The Holiday Project ([holiday-project.org](http://holiday-project.org)) to find out how you can become involved in your community.



# Spare Change

News, financial tips,  
and other information  
regarding personal  
financial freedom

## Don't be fooled by Internet crime

The Anti-Phishing Working Group, an association of professionals and organizations that have combined forces to fight Internet crime, reminds consumers to be cautious regarding suspicious e-mail, instant messages or text messages that appear to be from online retailers, banks or auctions sites.

Phishing is a form of Internet crime in which the perpetrator(s) attempt to fool people into giving out personal information by guiding them to a fake bank, retail or other company website which is almost identical to a legitimate site. According to the group, there has been a 600 percent increase in criminal "phishing" attacks this year.

Consumers may want to avoid responding directly to phone calls or e-mail communication claiming to be from a bank or other company they do business with. Also, consumers should be wary of clicking on links in e-mail messages that claim to be from familiar companies. It is suggested that consumers call the customer service number listed on their monthly account statement to verify that any communication received is legitimate.



## Some shoppers still carry debt from 2008 holiday

A recent Consumer Reports holiday shopping poll revealed that six percent of Americans, approximately 13.5 million consumers, continue to carry debt from last winter's holiday season.

According to Consumer Reports, of the 38 percent of consumers who made a budget last year, 44 percent reported that they exceeded it and five percent said they went over budget with many still struggling to pay off last year's holiday debt.

More than half of this year's survey participants indicated that they would once again make a budget for the 2009 holiday shopping season. They plan to spend less on themselves, holiday travel and entertaining.

Many who were surveyed plan to decrease spending by giving only to grandparents, grandchildren, relatives 18 years of age and under and the family pet.

Go to [www.ConsumerReports.org](http://www.ConsumerReports.org) if you would like more information on poll results.



## Tough economy concerns young adults, too

A report released by AARP indicates that older adults aren't the only Americans concerned about the economy. Young adults under 34 years of age are also feeling anxious. The survey, "Personal Finances: The Final Frontier of Social Media," is based on the answers of 1,002 young American adults aged 18-34.

Fifty-seven percent of those surveyed consider their financial situation to be the biggest concern in their lives with nearly eight out of ten young people having debt of some kind.

The most widespread form of debt among young adults surveyed is credit card debt, considered "bad debt" by most financial experts. Sixty-eight percent of respondents admit that finances have caused stress in their relationships and/or friendships.

The Freedom Debt Relief newsletter is published by The Premier Institute for Financial Freedom. While articles in this newsletter are factual and accurate, they are not intended to replace the advice of professional financial, accounting, and/or legal advisers. As with all decisions regarding your finances, the advice, techniques, ideas and suggestions offered herein should be followed under the supervision of the appropriate competent professional.



1875 South Grant Street  
Suite 400  
San Mateo, CA 94402  
Phone: (800) 655-6303  
FAX: (650) 897-8800