That could be me. This was only one of the many realities teenager Mo struggled with when her friend and teammate, super healthy Emily, was diagnosed with Leukemia two years ago. Another was, I'm a kid; what can I possibly do to help? Mo's desire to help outwrestled her sadness, confusion and birth-age and what she did next helped not only Emily, but many others, and probably Mo herself. She volunteered.

In his book, Thrive, Dan Buettner says, "Volunteering is one of the best ways to boost your happiness because it takes your focus off your own problems and increases your sense of pride in your community or social network. Volunteers tend to weigh less, to feel better, and to have less chance of suffering a heart attack."

Weigh less AND live longer? If only it were so easy! Oh, wait. It is. Newspapers, websites and the people around you are excellent resources to find out who volunteers and how anyone can get involved. With the holidays coming, many, many organizations welcome a hand. No special skills required. Every day, volunteers sort shelves, unload boxes, deliver meals, coach kids' teams, read to their grandfolks, rescue small animals and wash clothes for the homeless.

A group who calls themselves the Time Well Spent Gang makes breakfast once or twice a month in a shelter in Minneapolis. What hot food does for residents pales in comparison to what the Gang gains in return.
Mo signed up for The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Light the Night Walk, which funds lifesaving research and support for people with cancer. Individuals and teams reach out to friends and family, raise awareness about cancer and seek financial donations of any size. The effort culminates in a moving and memorable evening walk under the glow of lighted balloons representing those affected by Leukemia and Lymphoma.

It's okay to start small. Mo did. In her first year raising funds on behalf of the Leukemia Foundation, Mo raised $1100. This is far less than what some of the top fundraisers brought in. And far more than it seems, considering it goes toward finding a treatment that might one day save a life like Emily's. Or Mo's.

Did you know, employees who volunteer outside of work are more productive on the job? Send your comments and career planning questions to jdesmond@georgekonik.com.