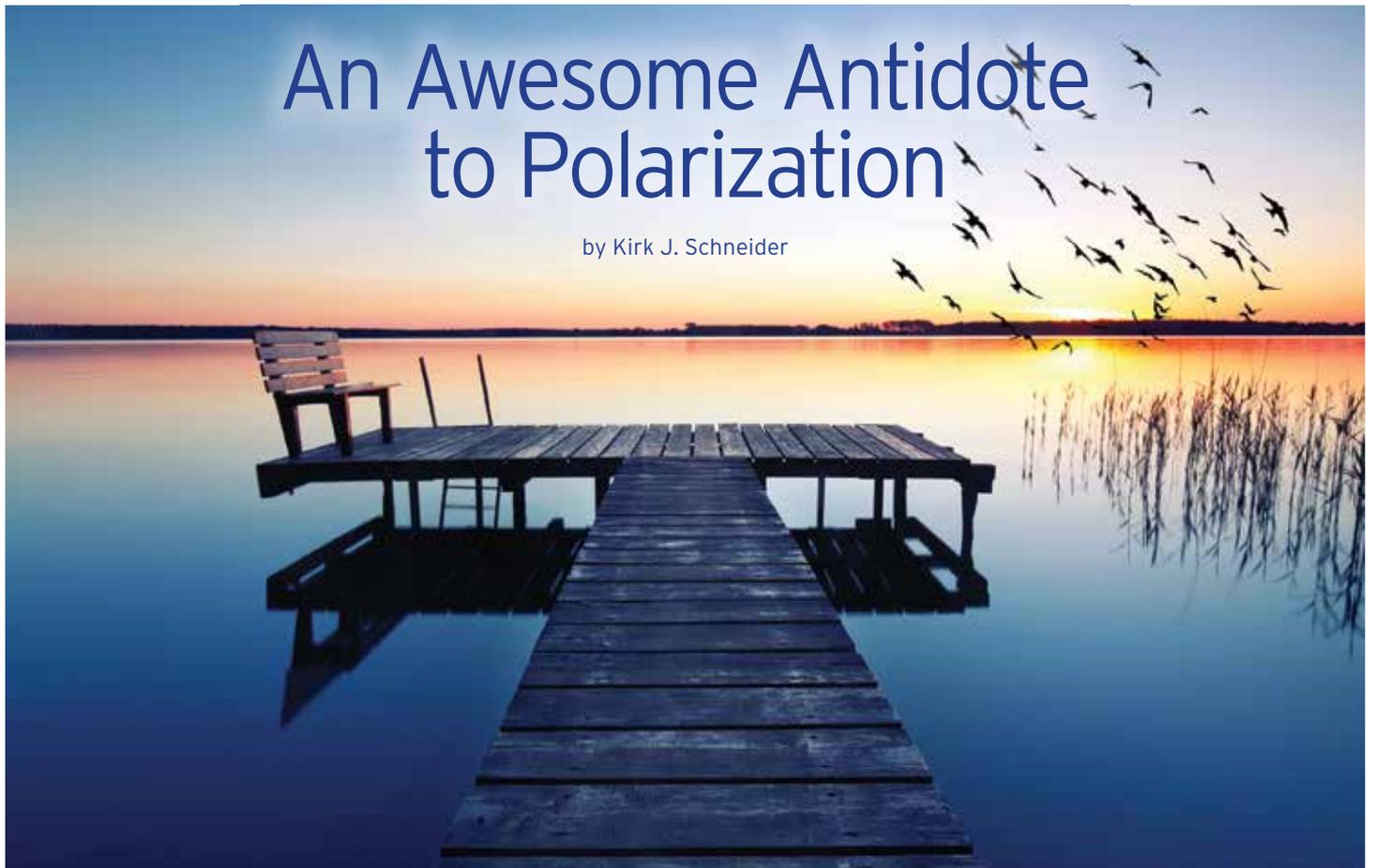


An Awesome Antidote to Polarization

by Kirk J. Schneider



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We live in polarized times. The current polarization of the American electorate and federal government is rooted in “the polarized mind”, a fixation by individuals on one point of view that excludes differing views and provokes intolerance. Complex issues become black and white, and those with differing views or lifestyles are demonized. Beyond politics, this is seen in gun violence and terrorism, corporate abuses of health and safety, and religious and ethnic strife—affecting major aspects of our daily lives.

An antidote to polarization is awe—the wonder of being alive; living life with hope, respect, humility, wonder and a deep reverence for the adventure of living.

Psychology experiments at Stanford University and the University of California, Berkeley, have shown those that practice awe are better able to see outside their own experiences and appreciate other points of view, which can transcend the tunnel vision and pettiness of a polarized atmosphere. Here are some basic steps toward cultivating a sense of awe:

- Appreciate the passing nature of time and life. Even while doing something disagreeable, slowing down and affirming the preciousness of the moment can sometimes render alternative perspectives.

- Be open to discovery and surprise. This is especially helpful if we are constantly locked in by assumptions about people or things. Think how politicians might benefit by being open to the possibility of discovery or surprise during delicate negotiations. The same principle can hold true with family and friends.

- Step outside the box of personal judgments and consider the bigger picture of life. Replace the prison of self-criticism often stemming from comparing ourselves with idealized media images with appreciation of the many facets of who we are and what we can become.

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