



***William McKnight  
Businessman, Industrialist, Head of 3M Corporation,  
Son of Homesteaders  
1887 - 1978  
White, South Dakota***

William L. McKnight was the third child born to Joseph and Cordelia McKnight, who left the East in 1880 to claim a homestead in rural South Dakota. William was born in the family's sod house in White, South Dakota on November 11, 1887.

McKnight attended Duluth Business University and began working for 3M Corporation as an Assistant Bookkeeper in May 1907. His salary then was \$11.55 per week. While working in this capacity, McKnight began to understand the truly dire financial situation of 3M. His ideas for making better products and still cutting costs gained him the admiration of the company's general manager, who soon promoted McKnight to the position of cost accountant. Two years after that, he was placed in charge of the company's Chicago office.

In 1914, McKnight was promoted to general manager of 3M and moved to the company's headquarters in St. Paul, Minnesota. There he continued to develop innovative ideas about how to more effectively run the business as well as stimulate 3M's employees to develop ideas for new products. Just two years later, in June 1916, the 29-year-old McKnight became 3M's vice president. Almost immediately, the company's president, L.P. Ober, became ill, and before long McKnight was running 3M. He officially became the company's president in August 1929. He served as president until 1949, as chairman of the board from 1949-1966, and as honorary chairman of the board until 1972.

McKnight's savvy business sense and emphasis on research and development helped bring 3M back from the brink of bankruptcy and turn it into the large, multinational corporation it is today. His innovations there led to the creation of many of the products 3M still produces today.

McKnight married in 1915 and had one daughter. He lived until March 4, 1978.