

Dr. Alan Sok's Sweet 16 Tips

Dr. Alan Sokoloff

Hi, I'm Dr. Alan Sokoloff. I am the team chiropractor for the Baltimore Ravens and have been for the last 19 years. I've worked with University of Maryland for the last 25 years. I've been involved with many different athletic training rooms successfully working with multi-disciplinary physicians and practitioners of all types. So today I'm going to pass on what my sweet 16 tips are for not only getting involved but staying involved.

Here we go. Tip number one, leave your ego at the door. I don't know why chiropractor schools do a great job of teaching doctors of chiropractic to be the king of the jungle, to be the king of their office, to be able to run things in their office from start to finish. However, in an athletic training room, they do things their way. They have done things their way. And we have to leave our ego at the door and be able to learn and listen.


Some of the best practitioners, chiropractors working in athletic training rooms in multi-disciplinary environments are not only great teachers but great learners. And that's what we have to do to. Number two, we have to understand that if you're working with an athletic team, those athletes are not your patients. If they're your patients, then you have control. But they're not. If they're your patients, you would be dealing with them every day. But you're not.

In your office, again, you're the king. You understand the history. You know everything about that patient. In an athletic training room setting, working with a team of physicians, athletic trainers, and other health care providers they are with those athletes every single day, and you become a tool. You become an essential tool, an essential part, but they are not your patients. So you have to work collectively with the physicians and athletic trainers around you to make sure you're looking out for the best interests of those athletes.

Number three, who are you ultimately accountable to? In some settings, it's the head athletic trainer. In some settings, it's the head team physician. Before you even get involved, know who you have to answer to. Know who you have to get your reports to. Know who you have to answer to if good things happen, which hopefully they will, or in the event that something less positive happens you know the chain of command to work through.

Here's one that's kind of tough. Do letters really matter? I'm talking about the letters after your name. You are here today, because you are studying to better yourself as a sports chiropractor. The letters do matter to you. On the outside, many practitioners, physicians, athletic trainers don't understand what all the alphabet soup after our name means.

So we have to do a good job of educating them on what those letters mean. Working in the NFL, I can tell you half of the chiropractors in the NFL do not have postgraduate degrees. Does that make that any less of a practitioner? Does that make them not able to do what they do? Certainly



not. But the classes you're taking now are great background to help build your resume of experience, so you can get to the next level.

Number five, know your team. So if you're going to go work with a professional football team, who's on your team? In the NFL, we have had team physicians. We have interns. We have orthopedist.

We have primary care physicians. We have nutritionists. We have dentist. We have strengthen and conditioning. We have team psychologists. We have, we have, we have, and so on and so forth. So you need to know who's on your team. Who can you rely on for a referral? Who can you rely on to send people to?

We have to stick to what we do best and surround ourselves with the best possible team around us. At the college level, that's very different. I work in college basketball where there's only a team physician and an athletic trainer. That's who I have around me. Those are my resources. And it's different at every level and every organization that you get to.

Number six, keep it simple. Keep it reproducible. I did a survey of different head trainers that I've worked with for the last almost 30 years now, and one of the biggest things that they've asked is to keep it simple. Keep it reproducible. If you are being hired as a doctor of chiropractic to provide spinal manipulation to athletes and that's what your job is, you are not there 24/7.

What if you're gone for a week and that athlete needs something? Who are they going to call? And what if you do something that's out of the box? Who are they going to call? What if works and you're not there and it can't be reproduced? Who are they going to call? What if it doesn't work, then I know who they're going to call. So we need to keep things as simple as possible.

Number seven, we need to stick to what we're being hired for. For example, as I mentioned, are you being hired as a doctor of chiropractics to perform spinal manipulation or an adjustment? Are you being hired as a doctor of chiropractic to perform soft tissue work? It is different at every level.

I know at a professional level, there are many teams in the NFL that have a doctor of chiropractic that just does adjustments and others that just do soft tissue. There are some that do dry needling. There are some that do certain rehab techniques. There are some that do certain taping techniques. But know your role and stick to what you're being hired for along the way educating whoever's in charge on the best ways that you can help that team. Because at the end, it is a team.

Number eight, number eight is great and I think is kind of the fundamental to everything, documentation and communication. I can tell you that even if I adjust a player, I am going to document what I adjusted, how I adjusted, when I adjusted. If I adjust one of the athletic trainers, which they are some of my best patients, I'm doing the same thing.

What about the equipment guy? I'm documenting that to. Every single person you lay your hands on, you need to document. And you need to communicate too. So if you treat a student athlete at a college, if you treat a professional athlete, you need to communicate what you have done and communicate in a language that everyone understands.

You can't say and present your notes to the head athletic trainer that says PI ileum atlas lateral. No, no, they don't care about that. What did you find on your exam? There was say mental dysfunction. There was limited range of motion. There was spasm. Whatever it is, document in a language that they're all going to understand.

Number nine, treatment recommendations. So you've worked up an athlete, and what if you are not going to be working with that athlete? What if they may need something that you don't do. You have to know what is available around you so you can refer through the proper channels. For example, if one of our athletes at the university needs an MRI, I know the channels that I need to go through.

Same thing for the Baltimore Ravens. If I suspect something, I report it to the head athletic trainer. And I will make the appropriate treatment recommendations through the head athletic trainer, because ultimately that person is in charge.

Number 10, this is kind of a hard one if you're just kind of a hired gun, but you need to know the history. Look, if you're working in an athletic training world or you're working in your office, either way you have to know the history of the people you're working on, especially athletes. How many of them had surgeries? How many of them had other procedures that were maybe done to them that are now contra-indicated for what you want to do.

So you need to know the history. Does that come from a file? Does it come from another doctor? Does it come from a head athletic trainer? Whatever it is get that history, so, so, so important. Number 11, know the time. Not like what time it is right now, but know your time. Know the time that you need to be at practice if you're covering a practice. Know the time that you need to be at a game. Know that those times are subject to change. You need to know the time.

I can't tell you how many doctors of chiropractic get into teams and don't show for something and go, you know, I forgot I have patient hours or I have something. You need to know the time of everything. And always know that it's very, very, very subject to change.

Number 12, know your schedule. So in my office we have three other doctors of chiropractic, because we cover four colleges, two professional teams, and a lot of other events in the area. So if we don't have a board of our schedule and who's covering what college and when, we're all lost or someone's not showing up. And ultimately it ends back up on me. Next to that, we have our patient schedule. So how are you going to see patients if you have to be covering an event? So number 12, real important, you have got to know your schedule. And before you even get involved with a team, can you afford the time to be involved with the team?

No where. Like not no where, but know where are you going to be working. Are you going to be working in an athletic training room. Are you going to be working at a hotel that the team is visiting? Are you going to be working at a stadium? Know where. Know where you need to be. And again, that is always subject to change. We're working with a university right now that has four different training rooms. So we have to know where we're seeing certain athletes and when.

Number 14, what should you bring. Do they have an adjusting table for you? Is it the right height adjusting table for you? Should you have some ointments or lotions or instruments or dry needles or what-- that all goes with your scope. What are you doing? What are you supplying? And what do you need to bring?

In most of the universities that we work with now, they now have adjusting tables, really cool. With the Baltimore Ravens, we have two adjusting tables, very cool. They have a portable table for away games.

You don't just show up and, like, OK, where are we going to be working? What do I need to bring? At the professional level, I don't need to bring anything. At the collegiate sometimes we do need to bring other things to help make the travel easier.

So number 15, this is one of my favorite, compensation or show me the money. Look, there are doctors of chiropractic out there that have it in their heart of hearts that we need to spread the word that chiropractic is great for athletes and all of these athletes should be treated for free, because we're such good people. Well, good people have a hard time paying for the education that they got. Good people have a hard time paying for family vacations.

If you are good and you are involved with the team, you should be compensated for what you do. Does not matter how your compensated. Is it are you getting a retainer for the season? Are you submitting to insurance? Maybe you're not getting money. So how does that work?

So if you-- maybe you're getting tickets and maybe your getting your name in a program. And if you gain from that, if you gain benefit from that, then do it. Or if you're doing it for a team or organization that you have a tie to and it makes you feel good and you're already getting something out of it internally instead of monetarily, that's fine too. But get something for what you do.

If you don't think that one of these professional athletes are going to turn around one day and say, hey, you know that got messed me up. Even though it was free, nah, I'm not going to sue yes, he will. So show me the money, one of my favorite things.

And last but not least, sweet 16. Number 16 is are you prepared? Are you prepared? You're taking these classes. That helps you be prepared. You're getting a great education, so that's a huge start. That can help prepare you.

But are you prepared when you get to where you need to go? Let me explain. When I show up to work a professional football game, I'm there half an hour to 45 minutes before I'm supposed to be there. I prepare myself. It is a physical job to work in the NFL. It's a physical job to be a doctor of chiropractic.

So what do you do for yourself first? I'll tell you what I do. I get there. I warm up my body. I go for a lap around the stadium. I foam roll. I get hydrated. I go to the bathroom too, because if we have a line of guys that you have to take care of, you don't have the time to take that break. I get dressed in the clothes that I'm supposed to be on. I check the table I'm going to be working on. Especially if you're working on a table that's not yours, the last thing you need are the legs collapsing on a 412 pound athlete. Well, it depends if you end up on top of him. But anyway, so you need to be prepared. You need- is there clean face paper. Is there everything around you that you need? You need to be prepared physically for yourself? You need to prepare the area around you. And you need to be as healthy as you can be so you can do the best job that you could do.

So is this the end, no. This is just the beginning. Doctors of chiropractic are involved in every sport here in the US and even more so around the country and around the world. So we need to do a better job of preparing ourselves physically, mentally, and you're already taking the next step through education. So thank you for joining me, and I look forward to seeing you on a field soon.